High School DxD

3

EXCALIBUR OF THE MOONLIT SCHOOLYARD

ICHIEI ISHIBUMI

ILLUSTRATION BY
Miyama-Zero

PARENTAL ADVISORY
WARNING
EXPLICIT CONTENT

HIGH SCHOOL
DXD
3
EXCALIBUR OF THE
MOONLIT SCHOOLYARD

My fingers brushed up against both of their shoulders.
At that instant—
their uniforms came flying right off.
Yes, not even their underwear was spared.

An artifact of
divine brilliance
and evil aura
took shape as
a sword in the
Knight's hand.

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3

ICHIEI ISHIBUMI

ILLUSTRATION BY
MIYAMA-ZERO

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Volume 3
Ichiei Ishibumi

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Life.0

Greetings, everyone. Issei Hyoudou here.

This is probably pretty sudden, but you all know what it's like to find yourself in a certain kind of troubling situation in bed, right?

You know, like when you wake up late because your alarm didn't go off, or you fall smack onto the floor because you kept moving around while you were asleep—that sort of thing.

In my case, the trouble was something that exceeded my wildest imaginings…

"Ngh…" A lustrous voice cooed in my ear. Man, it was close!

I turned to one side and was immediately met with the sight of a crimson-haired beauty. It was Rias Gremory—my master and a high-class demon.

She had all but forced her way into my house the other day, deciding entirely by herself that she would live here from now on.

She must have crept into my bed while I was asleep…a-and she was naked…

Well, that part was understandable. Rias had said a while back that she slept naked, and she had done the exact same thing once while I was in the infirmary at school.

Whaaaaa—! A warm, soft sensation surrounded the left side of my body. Rias was hugging me like a body pillow as she slept!

Her wonderful scent tickled at my nasal glands. Why did

she have to smell so good?!

Breasts were completely cupping my left arm! Not only that, but my left hand was enveloped by something incredibly soft! H-her thighs, maybe? My hand was sandwiched between her thighs! A thigh sandwich! It was wonderful!

It was a situation where moving wasn't an option. There was no way I was going to let an amazing position like that end so easily!

I'd been living with Rias for only a few days! At first, I'd been worried cohabitation would be difficult, but if I could enjoy pleasures like this, then it was totally worth it!

"…Oh, are you awake?"

Huh? She's not *asleep?!*

"A-ah, yeah. W-we were like this when I opened my eyes, so I didn't really know what to do…"

That much was the truth. Honestly, I *still* didn't know what to do. Now that Rias was awake, I was at even more of a loss.

"Forgive me, Issei. I felt like sleeping with you in my arms. I came in after you were already unconscious."

Rias had done it on purpose. I had to wonder exactly how she felt about me.

Amid my confusion, Rias hugged my left side even tighter.

Whoooooaaaaa!

"What should we do? We could stay like this until it's time to get up… But it might be fun to deepen my relationship with my cute little servant by doing something a bit naughty, no?"

Kiss.

The prez pecked me on my cheek!

This sudden affection really seemed to come out of nowhere. Maybe I imagined it, but I had a distinct feeling Rias had grown more loving after that incident with Riser. I was getting nosebleeds practically every day.

“Um, Prez… I-I’m a guy, right…? S-so if you keep saying things like that…”

“You might pounce on me?” she answered playfully.

Ugh, why was she so good at saying stimulating things?!

“It’s okay. I’ll do anything to please you,” Rias whispered in a sexy voice.

“—!”

My thoughts started diving straight into the realm of the senses when—

—there was a knock at the door.

“Issei! It’s almost time for your morning training session!”

The voice belonged to Asia.

…What timing! I was just getting to the good part! I was quick to correct myself, however. This wasn’t Asia’s fault.

Every morning, I subjected myself to a grueling training session. As demons went, I was still exceptionally weak, after all.

Under the prez’s guidance, I exercised every day. Asia had practically taken on the role of my manager, working to encourage me through it all. I was grateful to both of them.

“Issei? Are you still asleep?” Asia called.

“No, I’m awake! J-just give me a minute! Actually, wait for me downstairs!”

I couldn’t let her see me like this. Things were already bad enough with her starting to see Rias as a rival ever since Rias had moved in here.

Why Asia had taken that attitude with the prez was a mystery to me, but Rias had curiously seemed to accept the challenge head-on.

Thankfully, they did still talk to each other normally, so maybe they weren’t fighting for real. In any event, I hoped they could both get along… I didn’t want to get involved in any kind of conflict.

Completely incognizant of my worries, Rias broke into a demonic grin. “Asia, please wait for us outside. Issei and I

still have to get ready,” she said in reply to the girl beyond the door.

“—!”

P-Prez! Why are you adding fuel to the fire?!

Click!

The door to my room swung open with sudden urgency.

Asia saw me sitting upright in bed with the prez at my side.

Tears were in Asia’s eyes. Her cheeks were puffed out, and she looked to be in a seriously bad mood…

Seeing Asia’s reaction, Rias wrapped her body even more tightly around my arm.

Please calm down, Rias!

“Good morning, Asia,” the crimson-haired girl said with a bright smile.

Asia’s whole body was trembling. Steam was practically whistling from her ears. All of a sudden, she lifted a hand to her clothes.

Please calm down, Asia!

“I’ll strip naked, too! I don’t want to be left out!” she declared.

“Asia?!”

It looked like the day was already off to a stimulating start.

—○●○—

“Thanks for the meal.”

Rias and Asia were sitting at either side of me during breakfast.

Caught between two beauties…I was truly blessed! At least, that’s what I would’ve liked to think. It sure didn’t feel like a gift from above sometimes. Asia was clearly in a particularly bad mood this morning.

She was a former nun, so I wondered if maybe she

thought Rias and me sleeping naked together was immoral. If that was the case, though, then why had she insisted on stripping, too?

Try as I did, I couldn't understand what she was so angry about. I guess the heart of a maiden was unknowable for a guy like me.

On the other hand, the prez didn't seem particularly bothered and was chatting with my parents as we ate.

"Ah, I had no idea you were so good at cooking Japanese food, Rias."

"Thank you, Father. I've been living in Japan for a long time, so I've picked up the basics."

Yep, the prez had prepared that morning's menu. Her rolled omelets and the various seasonings were exquisite, and I had been eating heartily nonstop ever since we started. It was seriously delicious!

"There's plenty more, Issei, so do take your time."

"R-right, Prez…"

I hadn't known until she had started living with us, but Rias was an expert in the kitchen. Whether it was Japanese food, Western food, or Chinese food, her repertoire was filled with recipes of the finest quality.

Given that she'd been raised as a noblewoman, I'd assumed that she wouldn't be particularly skilled at this kind of work, but the reality couldn't have been further from the truth.

Rias hadn't been living by herself here in Japan for appearances' sake—she could set herself to any act of cooking, washing, or cleaning and carry it through flawlessly.

I remember she once told me, *"I don't like being told that I can't do something just because I'm a lady. If I'm capable of doing it by myself, I want to."*

She was beyond incredible! My respect for her knew no bounds. Even when it came to everyday living, my master was so dependable!

Unfortunately, this meant that Asia was always being shown up by her perceived rival. With a sort of crestfallen determination, she'd been endeavoring to learn everything she could about Japanese culture.

Asia was quite amazing, too, in her own way. She'd learned a lot of Japanese written characters in a very short span of time. She had already mastered hiragana and katakana and was charging ahead into kanji.

I had no doubts that she could already read the characters taught in early elementary school.

A lot of that was undeniably due to her hard work, but it seemed to me that she also had an innate talent for studying.

She'd only recently started attending school, but she was having no trouble with math, science, or languages.

Above all, she said that she enjoyed learning, which probably explained why she could take it all in so quickly. Actually, she was even tutoring me in a few areas. It was pitiful, in a way. *I* was supposed to be *her* guardian.

That girl, who relished setting herself to any task, was now burning with a competitive spirit aimed squarely at Rias.

She was certainly a hard worker, but if she was going up against the prez, well…

The way things were, Rias's cooking was the winner. Asia's food was delicious as well, but it wasn't really a fair fight…

I sipped at my miso soup. *Ah, the prez's work really is amazing!* I thought. I could've burst into joyous tears from how delicious it was.

Girls who knew their way around a kitchen had a particular charm about them. What possible reason could there have been to complain if that girl also happened to be a beautiful lady?

Beneath the table, Asia gripped the hem of my shirt. She wore a sullen look. This was a side of her that she showed

only to me.

When something made her feel despondent, she would silently appeal to me like this. It was a cute mannerism, and it possessed a unique charm. I wondered if this was what it felt like to have a younger sister.

“By the way, Issei,” Rias began. “I’m having everyone come over here later today.”

“Huh? Koneko and the others? They’re coming here?”

“Yes. I’m thinking about holding our Occult Research Club meeting here after school.”

“At my house, you mean?”

“Didn’t I mention it earlier? It’s about time we tidied up the old school building. I’ve asked the cleaners to see to everything.”

That was only half-true. In reality, she would use her familiars to complete the work, but she couldn’t very well say that in front of my parents.

This meant that the club would be meeting at my house.

Rias bowed her head to my mom and dad. “I’m terribly sorry for the intrusion, Father, Mother.”

“Not at all, Rias. You’ve been taking such good care of Issei. You don’t know how happy I am that he has so many female friends now,” my mom replied.

My dad nodded along in agreement. “Your mother’s right. I like Matsuda and Motohama, but the way I see it, it’s also important to have some more wholesome friends. You can’t waste your youth hiding out in your room talking about sex.”

“Exactly, dear. Matsuda and Motohama are good boys, but they have a lecherous look about them. That may be their nature, but it’s obvious they’ve been having a negative influence on our Issei. And now that Asia and Rias are living with us, I don’t want to let those two into our house. They could end up sullying our young girls.”

Sorry, Matsuda and Motohama. My parents bad-mouthed you behind your backs. The truth was that I couldn’t really

say anything in their defense, though. My folks were totally right.

It was good to have friends I could speak freely with, however. That's what Matsuda and Motohama were to me. They were the reason I'd had so much fun before my demon life began.

"That settles it, then. We'll be having the club meeting here. Thank you again, Issei," Rias concluded.

I had to wonder how this abrupt visit was going to play out.

—○●○—

"And this is Issei when he was in elementary school."

"Oh my! He went to the beach stark naked?"

"Hold it right there, Akeno! Hey, Mom, you don't need to show them that!"

My own mother had decided to show everyone an embarrassing photo album, bringing a swift end to our after-school Occult Research Club meeting.

"…Issei's unvarnished past."

"Don't look, Konekooooo!"

Believe me, it was horrible! That nightmarish collection of pictures was a window into my embarrassing childhood! Argh! I wanted to die!

Suddenly, I recalled my mother mentioning one time that she wanted to show off photos of me if I ever brought a bunch of girls home.

Considering how unpopular I was, she must have abandoned that dream a long time ago. My life's recent reversal had allowed her to make that nightmare a reality, however.

"…Little Issei."

Rias was staring intently at the pictures of me as a kid. It was humiliating…

Huh? Prez? Perhaps it was my imagination, but I thought I saw her cheeks redden for a moment.

"…Young Issei, young Issei, young Issei, young Issei, young Issei…"

What was she muttering to herself?

Regardless, she seemed happy. Did she like how I looked as a kid? Did she have a thing for young boys? I'd never heard her mention anything of the sort before…

"I know how you feel, President!" Asia had grabbed ahold of Rias's hands. Her eyes were sparkling.

"You understand, don't you? I'm so pleased."

The two of them had fallen into their own little world…

Even Kiba was looking through the album with a wide grin. I cursed silently to myself. Why did his looking through the pictures bother me so much?

"H-hey! Kiba! Don't waste your time looking at those!" I insisted.

I tried to take the album from his hands, but he brushed me off with a light movement.

"Ha-ha, it's fine, isn't it? Let me enjoy your photos a little longer."

Nghhhhh! Don't "enjoy" them!

I leaped at him, trying to wrest it back, but he evaded my lunge as if it was nothing.

Dammit! Even at a time like this, it was clear how much stronger than me he was.

Asia's rival was Rias, and I suppose Kiba was mine. If the prez seemed perched upon some high wall to Asia, then to me, it felt like Kiba was on a skyscraper!

I swore to scale those heights one day.

Just as I was renewing my determination, I noticed that Kiba was staring intently at a specific page. He didn't seem to be enjoying it exactly. Rather, he looked somehow surprised.

I drew close, turning my gaze to the photo he was devouring so intently. It was a picture of me back when I

was in kindergarten.

It wasn't just little Issei in the picture, though. There was another child around my age—and a figure who looked like his father.

The other boy had lived in the neighborhood back when I was in kindergarten. We'd often played together, pretended to be heroes, that sort of thing.

He'd ended up moving overseas because of his parents' jobs before the start of elementary school. I hadn't seen him since.

So why was Kiba so interested in that photo? The thought that *he* was that kid crossed my mind, and I felt something churn in my stomach.

Kiba pointed to the boy's father in the photo. More specifically, he was pointing at what the boy's father was holding.

It was a European-style sword.

I'd always thought it to be fake.

"Do you remember this?" Kiba asked me, his expression serious.

The sudden shift in his demeanor threw me off.

"Hmm… Not really. I mean, I was just a kid back then…"

"So these kinds of strange coincidences really do happen. I would never have thought to have found it here…" Kiba laughed softly to himself.

His eyes, however, were filled with a chilling sense of hatred.

That photograph would prove to be the beginning of our next little adventure.

"That is a Holy Sword."

Life.1

Rise Up, Occult Research Club!

Clang.

A dull metallic sound echoed through the sky.

“All right! I’ve got this!”

I caught the ball in my baseball glove.

“Nice catch, Issei!” the prez complimented with a grin and a thumbs-up.

We, the members of the Occult Research Club, were practicing baseball in the small grassless clearing behind the old school building.

Before you ask, no, this wasn’t part of our demon work.

Rias had energetically told us that “next week is the Kuou Academy Ball Tournament. We’ll be facing off against other clubs, so we can’t afford to lose.”

Yep, it was already time for one of the academy’s main events, the so-called “Ball Tournament.”

It was a day dedicated to all manner of ball-based sports—baseball, soccer, basketball, tennis, you name it.

There were going to be class competitions, matches between boys and girls, and most importantly of all, a club tournament.

Even cultural clubs that had nothing to do with sports would be participating. That included the Occult Research Club.

What game each team would be playing wasn’t to be announced until the day of, so we had no clue what to practice. When two clubs had a different number of

members, smaller clubs could be forced to band together as one for particular games.

Some sports required a larger number of players, so the student council had authorized a kind of reservoir from which they could supply additional members.

Anyway, we were going through a rotating schedule of practice. Today, it was baseball.

It was almost evening, and night was fast approaching. Normally, we would've spent our time in the clubroom drinking tea and making idle conversation until we had to get to work. Lately, however, I found myself changing into my athletic uniform more often than not.

It wasn't like I hated physical activity or anything. Playing with the other club members was kind of fun. Given that my mornings consisted of an intense training regimen, however, the afternoon exercise left me feeling half-dead.

Morning practice, school classes, ball games as part of our club activities, and then my nighttime demon work…

Frankly, it wouldn't have been surprising if I collapsed from exhaustion… I suppose that being a demon gave me more endurance than would have otherwise been expected.

"That's enough batting practice for now. If we play baseball, Koneko will be our fourth batter," Rias declared.

"…Understood."

That made sense. The superhuman Koneko was undeniably the best choice for scoring a home run. No one would've complained about that choice. Heck, even if we went through a draft process, she still would've come out on top.

"All right, everyone! Next up, let's try some fungo drills! Put on your gloves and spread out!"

Rias was positively bursting with competitive spirit. She was really getting into all this sports stuff.

"The president loves these kinds of events," Akeno revealed with a light chuckle.

"Makes sense. She hates to lose," I replied.

“Indeed. Of course, I doubt that will happen. We need to be warier of fatal blunders.”

Right. As a general rule, we demons were stronger and sturdier than humans.

It sounded like we would have to hold back a bit on the big day, of course, but even so, it was hard to imagine it being too difficult.

The prez urged us to keep practicing until we knew everything about baseball by heart nonetheless.

“Even if your mind knows how to play, if your body doesn’t, that’s as good as a loss already,” Rias fervently reminded.

She was indomitable. Drilling the rules of the game into our very flesh even if we had an overwhelming advantage was so like her.

Anything could happen in a real-life game, and that was why we practiced.

“All right, Asia! Here I go!”

Clang!

The prez sent the first ball flying toward the former nun.

“Ha! Aaau-aaau-aaau… Ah!”

The ball passed straight under Asia’s legs. Her mobility and athleticism were rather subpar. Every now and then, she even tripped for no clear reason at all.

“Asia! You still need to go get the ball even if you can’t catch it!”

“A-ah, okay!”

After what’d happened with Riser Phenex, Rias was even more concerned about playing to win.

She must have been truly disappointed that we had lost in our Rating Game against him and his Familia.

We’d been at an obvious disadvantage, but even so, our loss had dealt a severe wound to Rias’s pride.

She’d sworn that we’d win… I cursed myself for not having been more capable…

“Next up, Yuuto! Here goes!”

Clang!

This time, she hit the ball to Kiba.

This should be no problem for him, I thought. He was our fastest runner, and he had no problem carrying out whatever task fell his way.

Or so I'd thought…

"…"

Smack.

He continued to stare vacantly down at his feet even after the ball struck him square on the head.

Hey, hey, hey!

"Kiba! Get ahold of yourself!" I called out before I realized what I was doing.

My voice must have reached him, as he glanced my way with a puzzled look. "…Ah, sorry. I zoned out for a minute."

He reached down to pick up the ball, then threw it back to Rias.

Rias let out a deep sigh as she caught it. "Yuuto, what's wrong? It isn't like you to keep spacing out like this."

"Forgive me," Kiba apologized with sincerity.

The prez was right, though. Kiba did seem to be brooding about something a lot lately.

Even during our regular meetings at the Occult Research Club, he'd been spending most of his time staring off into the distance without contributing to any of our discussions.

After asking around, I discovered that his recent mood had been the cause of much consternation in his class.

Girls had taken to calling him the Pensive Prince. Strangely, they seemed both excited by and worried about him.

Normally, I would've hated that pretty boy for hogging all the attention, but it was pretty clear something was bothering him.

I'd never expected that our perpetually cheerful Kiba could end up like this.

…If my suspicions were correct, he had been this way

ever since we held the club meeting at my house. Had that photo been the cause?

Back during our match against Riser's Familia, Kiba's voice had seethed with visceral hatred when he fought against the other side's Knight.

He seemed to have some kind of history with these Holy Sword things…

That was a separate matter, though. Right now, we were supposed to be focusing on the upcoming school tournament.

"Hmm…"

Rias was looking over her baseball manual again. She liked to consult books whenever she encountered a problem. The prez was a voracious reader. Even at home, she was often reading complicated-looking texts.

"Oh dear. I don't suppose you've heard yet, have you, Issei?" Akeno began.

"Heard what?" I asked.

"The president has started reading a love manual."

"A-a love manual?! Wh-why would she…?"

Talk about a shock… If she was reading a love manual… Hold on, did that mean there was someone she liked…? M-my prez…with some guy…?

Arghhhhh! I didn't even want to consider the possibility! I held my head in my hands.

Akeno flashed me an amused smile as she watched. "Oh-ho. You don't need to worry, Issei. Everything is fine. At the very least, you can rest assured that the president won't take on a lover while you're around."

"A-are you sure…? I'll take you at your word. Ah, if she ever *did* get a boyfriend, though, I would probably die…"

"If your positions were reversed, I'm sure she would be quite shocked, too. At any rate…this is a first for her. You'll have to watch out, Issei."

"…?"

I didn't really get what Akeno was saying, but so long as

the prez wasn't interested in any other guys, then everything was fine.

"All right, let's keep going!" Rias raised her baseball bat into the air, and our practice session resumed.

—○●○—

Lunchtime had arrived on the following day.

The Ball Tournament was fast approaching. I probably had another rough training session in store after classes ended.

I was supposed to go to the clubroom after I was finished eating. It was going to be our last meeting, apparently. Rias sure was taking this all very seriously.

"Do you have club activities today as well?" Matsuda asked me between mouthfuls of his curry bun.

"Yeah. We're practicing for the Ball Tournament."

"Oh, so the Occult Research Club is playing sports now? I guess all its members are pretty athletic, so it makes sense."

"You could say that."

I mean, we were all demons. Compared to your average humans, we were much stronger.

"You had better watch yourself, Issei. There are all kinds of weird rumors going around about you," the glasses-clad Motohama suddenly warned.

"Wh-what do you mean…?"

"People are saying that you're a savage beast who throws himself on one beautiful lady after another. Some think you managed to get your hands on Rias's and Akeno's darkest secrets, and now you're forcing them to perform all kinds of perverted sexual acts against their will. *Heh, you're normally so dignified, my ladies, but let's see those pretty faces of yours writhe in uncontrollable ecstasy! You s—!* You abuse them like that, both verbally and physically,

right?”

“Huh?! What kind of made-up nonsense is that?!” I blurted out in a rage.

Anyone would’ve gotten angry after hearing such outlandish stuff!

“That’s not all. Word is that you’re such a savage sex fiend that you even sank your fangs into our school’s petite mascot Koneko. You instigated such a violent physical encounter that it could’ve easily broken her small body. Monster that you are, you feasted on her underdeveloped flesh. *Issei… Please stop…*, she begged, but those words failed to reach your lustful ears. Your sexual desires still unsatisfied, you threw yourself at our angelic Asia, on the very day she transferred to your class, no less. *I’ll drill a special lesson in Japanese culture into you after school*, you sneered. Then you yanked that beautiful angel down into carnal reality in the evening twilight… You took her to your house and subjected her to a never-ending hell as you broke her in. Beware, maidens, for the savage Issei’s desire for young beauties will never be satisfied… At least, that’s the gist of what I heard.”

“…Seriously? I-is that how everyone sees me?”

I glanced furtively around the room. It did seem like my classmates were staring at me as if eyeing a predatory animal…

No! I told myself. *I have to be imagining it!*

I was furious and wholly ready to kill whoever had started such ridiculous hearsay.

“Well, you can thank us for getting the ball rolling.”

“Yep.”

Motohama and Matsuda admitted to the crime without any hesitation.

For a moment, I thought they were kidding. They were supposed to be my friends, after all.

Whack! Thump!

Wordlessly, I lashed out at both of them. It served them

right, those jerks!

“That hurt, you savage!”

“Right, don’t hit us, you beast!”

“Quit screwing around! Don’t spread rumors about me! I ought to kill the two of you!”

“Hmm. It’s the only thing that keeps us from going crazy with jealousy!”

“Ha! We might have already lost it a little!”

“You should be ashamed! What are you trying to do to my school life?!”

“By the way, there’s another rumor suggesting you and Kiba are a thing.”

“Your rapacious desire even includes those fair members of your own sex! You can thank us for starting that one, too.”

“It’s particularly popular among the girls.”

“Yep. *Kyah! Who’s the top, and who’s the bottom?* That’s what they’re all thinking.”

“Die! Dammit, you two!”

They were the worst friends imaginable! Argh! If I hadn’t known them for as long as I had, I would seriously have beaten them both to a pulp! What were they trying to do?!

Ugh… On any other day, it would’ve been fine to spend my lunchtime bantering with my buddies, but I had to go do club activities.

I stuffed my empty lunch box into my bag and glanced around the classroom.

Hold on—where’s Asia?

I spotted her talking to another girl in the corner of the room. I was relieved that she had found some female classmates to talk with.

“Sorry, Matsuda, Motohama, I’ve got club activities, so I’ll see you later,” I said.

“Oh, no rest for the wicked. Keep up the good work.”

“Since when are you so into sports?”

“Can’t help it. The prez’s orders. If we’re going to play,

I've gotta play to win."

"When did you get so hot-blooded? Not long ago, I wouldn't have been able to picture you getting excited about anything that wasn't sex-related."

"Seriously, you've changed. Did you eat something weird? Did seeing real breasts give you a new outlook on life or something?"

"No matter how many times you see the real things, they're always amazing," I replied.

"Die!"

"Die!"

Heh! Hate me as much as you want! While you two are muttering to yourselves in jealousy, I'll be feasting my eyes on Rias's glorious breasts!

I had to wonder if my friends were right. Had I really changed that much? I guess it was possible.

"Hey, Asia. Are you ready to go?" I called out.

"Asia, your boyfriend wants you," said the bespectacled girl eating her lunch with a lewd expression. Her name was Aika Kiryuu.

"B-b-b-b-boyfriend?!" Asia trembled uncontrollably at Kiryuu's comment.

I had never seen her act so flustered before.

Still, I guess any girl would've been taken by surprise if someone suggested that she had a romantic relationship with a guy friend.

"Huh? Am I wrong? You're always hanging out together, so I thought you were a couple."

"Th-th-th-th-that's… Auuuu…"

Asia's face flushed scarlet. Everyone in the room immediately turned to face her and me. It was thoroughly embarrassing.

"Hmm. Is that so? From where I'm standing, you sure look like the kind of couple who joins together each night, no? You're always so intimate with each other. And don't you live under the same roof? A young couple spending

their lives together in the same home… Oh my. By the way, I'm the one who suggested bathing together naked. How was it? Did you enjoy yourselves?"

Heeeeey, hold on there! What's with this sex-obsessed girl?! I'd heard that some people called her the Craftswoman, but was *this* really her craft?!

"*You're* the reason for that bathroom fiasco! And what do you mean, 'join'?! We aren't two robots merging together! I'm not that shameless! A-and besides, even if I wanted to do erotic stuff, I couldn't do that kind of thing to Asia!" I fired back.

It was my job to protect her! I—I was in no position to lay a hand on her sexually!

"Hmm? That's strange. I mean, Asia certainly—"

Before Kiryuu could finish, Asia threw her hands over the other girl's mouth to stop her from speaking.

"A-a-a-a-ah! Kiryuu, please stop!"

Asia…? I had never seen her cheeks turn so red before… I could spot tears forming in the corners of her eyes.

Did Kiryuu know something that Asia didn't want me to find out? It wasn't really my place to pry if the two girls shared a secret.

"A-anyway, Asia. We've got club activities during lunch break, so let's go to the clubroom," I said.

"R-right!"

Asia was still clearly rattled. That conversation had probably been a bit too much for her, considering her upbringing. I would've been embarrassed, too, if someone suddenly announced that I had a girlfriend…

That's not to say I wouldn't have been happy if she *was* my girlfriend. For the time being, however, my feelings toward Asia were more of a protective sort.

That said, I couldn't even imagine a life without her anymore. That smile of hers had become a part of my very existence.

As I dwelled upon that happy notion, Asia and I made our

way to the old school building.

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All the other club members were already there when we arrived. To my surprise, there were two additional faces as well.

—!

My shock was plain after I realized who the other two figures were.

“Th-the student council chairwoman…?” I gasped.

Yep, the student council chairwoman of Kuou Academy was sitting on a sofa right in front of me. She was a slender and intelligent-looking young woman with a cold and severe aura about her.

She had a different sort of glamorous appearance than a traditional Japanese woman. Her name was Souna Shitori. She had a reputation of being an upstanding third-year student, and she was my senior.

She was also the third-most-popular figure at school, after Rias and Akeno.

Her frightening atmosphere was enough to keep any outsider at bay. Her severe eyes were partly responsible for that. Nonetheless, she too was a considerable beauty.

Souna actually had more girl fans than she did boys. In that sense, she was more beloved than both Rias and Akeno.

The chairwoman hadn’t come alone. A young man with some clear connection to the student council was sitting next to her.

“What’s this? Didn’t you mention us to Hyoudou, Rias? I’m surprised he hasn’t noticed already, seeing as we’re all demons here,” said the guy.

Hold on—didn’t he recently join the student council as a secretary?

The chairwoman quietly replied, “Saji, as you’re well aware, we operate in the shadows and don’t meddle in each other’s affairs. What’s more, Issei hasn’t been a demon for very long. This is a natural response, all things considered.”

W-wait a second!

Things were developing faster than I could grasp. Souna seemed to be suggesting that the student council members were also demons… The idea that there were demons at Kuou Academy other than those in the Occult Research Club had never crossed my mind.

My bewilderment must’ve been evident to everyone, as Akeno began to explain the situation to me.

“The real name of the student council chairwoman, known here as Souna Shitori, is Sona Sitri. She is a high-class demon and the heir to the House of Sitri.”

“A-a high-class demon”?! “The House of Sitri”?! I wasn’t particularly familiar with the name. Still, I knew enough to recognize that it was a family of equal importance to Rias’s House of Gremory and Riser’s House of Phenex!

My mouth had figuratively lost the ability to form words. I was beyond surprised to learn that there was another high-class demon at this school!

Akeno continued, explaining, “The House of Sitri, like the houses of Gremory and Phenex, is one of the surviving Seventy-Two Pillars from the Great War. The House of Gremory might be the power behind Kuou Academy, but in reality, it is the student council—in other words, the House of Sitri—that manages the school’s affairs. Think of it in terms of day and night operations.”

R-right… Hold on. Then the other members of the student council…?

Before I even had time to ask the question, the secretary guy spoke up. “It’s thanks to the chairwoman and members of the Sitri Familia like me that you enjoy your peaceful school life. You would do well to keep that in mind, got it? By the way, my name is Saji Genshirou. I’m a second-year

and the chairwoman's Pawn."

"Oh…hey, you're in the same grade as I am! And we're both Pawns!"

Talk about a happy coincidence! To think that there was another Pawn at Kuou, and in the same year, too!

That Saji guy didn't seem too pleased, though. "Just so you know, it wounds my pride to be compared to one of the members of the Perverted Trio…," he said with a sigh.

"Wh-what was that?!"

Th-that bastard! And here I was, trying to get along with him!

"Oh? You want to fight? Just so you know, the chairwoman had to spend four whole Pawn pieces on me. I might've only recently become a demon, but I'll kick your ass, Hyoudou," Saji spat. The gauntlet had been thrown.

The chairwoman, however, glared at him. "Saji. Stop it."

"B-but, Chairwoman!"

"The point of this visit is to allow the two high-class demons at Kuou Academy the chance to introduce their newest servants. In other words, we're here to introduce you, Hyoudou, and Argento. Don't disgrace my Familia. And besides…" At that moment, the chairwoman turned her gaze to me. "Saji, you couldn't hope to beat Hyoudou as he is now. He's the one who defeated Riser Phenex. It took eight Pawns to make him a demon."

"Eight of them?! You're saying *he's* the guy who beat Phenex?! This guy beat Riser…?! I thought it must have been Kiba or Akeno…"

I couldn't hear what they were talking about, but it was clearly something that involved me. More than anything, I wanted that Saji guy to stop staring at me out of the corner of his eye. I wasn't some exotic zoo animal on display for his entertainment.

The chairwoman bowed her head. "My apologies, Hyoudou, Argento. My servant doesn't have the experience that you both do, and he still hasn't learned proper

etiquette. If it isn't too much to ask, I hope that you'll get along with him as a fellow newcomer demon," she said with a faint smile.

It was a cold expression. I couldn't sense any maliciousness in her attitude, though, so perhaps that was just a quirk of her normal demeanor.

"Saji," Chairwoman Souna insisted.

"Er, y-yes…! I hope we can all get along," he said, bowing his head reluctantly. He didn't look particularly pleased by the situation.

"It's nice to meet you," Asia responded with a carefree smile. She really was a gentle soul.

"I'm delighted to meet *you*, Asia!" Saji exclaimed all of a sudden, taking her hands in his own.

His reaction to her was the polar opposite of how he'd regarded me.

I pulled his hands away from Asia's, grabbing them tightly in my own. "Ha-ha-ha! Saji! The pleasure is all mine! Just so you know, if you lay a hand on her again, I'll kill you," I said with a forced grin.

At this, he too broke into a half smile, his grip tightening around mine as he shook my hands. "Yep, here's to the future, Hyoudou! Claiming this blond beauty entirely for yourself—you really are a savage sex fiend! Ah, I wonder what kind of divine retribution is waiting in store for you. I hope you get struck by lightning in the middle of the schoolyard!"

Our exchange of thinly veiled threats continued for a while. It must have been a strange sight, but I didn't care. No way was I going to forgive that bastard. I hated this kind of guy in a completely different way than I did pretty boys like Kiba! I seriously wanted to hit him! No way was he going to get off easy the next time he touched Asia!

The prez and the chairwoman let out resigned sighs.

"He must be hard work," one of them said.

"I was about to say the same," replied the other.

“Tch. The members of the student council are stronger than those of your club,” Saji spat as he released my hands.

That confirmed that the student council was a front for Sona’s Familia.

The chairwoman took a sip from her tea. “I love this school,” she said softly. “And I’m dedicated to my work for the student council, which is why I won’t forgive anyone, human or demon, who disturbs the peace here. That goes for everyone in this room, yourself included, Rias.”

It was quite clear that Sona’s comment was meant for Asia, Saji, and me. We were the newest to demon life.

She was saying that she wouldn’t allow any of us to interfere with the normal flow of school life. She must have truly loved Kuou Academy. I could see why she was the student council chairwoman.

“Well, I think that settles what we came here for. We best be on our way. I have some documents that I want to take care of before lunch break is over.” With that, the chairwoman rose to her feet and moved to leave.

“Chairwoman—er, Sona Sitri… Ma’am…? You can count on me.” I bowed my head.

“I-it was good to meet you!” Asia said, mimicking my motion.

Sona was an acquaintance of Rias’s and a high-class demon. No matter how rude her servant was, new Gremory Familia members were expected to maintain a certain level of politeness.

The chairwoman smiled. “Yes, all the best,” she returned.

Before departing, she issued one final comment to the prez. “You seem to be looking forward to the Ball Tournament, Rias.”

“Yes, very much so,” the prez answered with a smile of her own.

I could see from their interactions that they were on generally good terms. It made me wonder why Sona hadn’t raised a finger to help during that last incident involving

Rias and her House. I kept my mouth shut, however, thinking that perhaps meddling in the affairs of other high-class demons wasn't particularly easy.

Or maybe she had trusted Rias to solve the issue by herself?

The door out to the hall closed, and the chairwoman was gone.

"Issei, Asia. Do try to get along with Saji. The other student council members are demons, too, and I'm sure you'll both meet them before too long. They are your classmates and colleagues, so make sure you don't pick a fight with any of them, understood?" Rias asked.

"Yes!" we both replied.

If that's what Rias wanted, then that's what I'd do! That Saji could be a jerk all he liked. I wasn't going to take the bait.

More than that, though, I was still reeling from discovering there were other demons at Kuou Academy…

Evidently, the school still had plenty of secrets in store for me.

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Bang! Bang!

Fireworks erupted in the sky overhead to announce the beginning of the Ball Tournament.

The weather forecast had promised rain in the evening. We could only hope that it wouldn't start until the tournament was finished.

"Tsukamoto of the Manga Research Club, Ms. Hashioka is calling for you. Please make your way to the staff room at once—"

Loudspeakers installed on tents that dotted the school grounds continued to provide a never-ending stream of announcements.

After donning my sports uniform, I met up with the other Occult Research Club members at one corner of the grounds. We were each trying to relax before the match in our own way.

That said, the games between the various clubs weren't until later. First up were the class matches. My class was playing baseball, if I remembered correctly. Both Asia and I had to take part. It was a good thing we'd spent that time practicing after school.

After that were the events between boys and girls, then, at around lunchtime, came the club games.

I was doing light muscle training to warm my body. Asia was doing some body stretches with Akeno's help.

Koneko was sitting on a vinyl tarpaulin for a final look over the rule book for a bunch of different ball games.

Kiba…looked like he was lost in thought again today. He was staring idly off into the sky.

The prez had gone to check the timetable for the day's events and was on her way back now.

Upon her return, she flashed us all a dauntless grin and let out a light chuckle. "We've already won our next match."

"What are we playing, Prez?" I asked.

She made a peace sign with her fingers. "Dodgeball!"

I had a bad feeling about this.

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"Preeeeez! You can do it!" I cheered from the fence surrounding the tennis court.

Rias in her tennis outfit sure was something. Her thighs peeking from beneath her miniskirt were a sight to behold!

She was representing the girls from her class and was facing off against the other third-year girls.

Slam!

She was trying to show off against her opponent by using

smooth, delicate movements, but her adversary was no slouch, either!

“Chairwomaaaaan! Kyahhhh!”

The high-pitched cheers of those girls who were spectating drowned out everything else.

Yep, the prez was up against none other than the student council chairwoman herself, Souna Shitori.

“It’s a wonderful thing, watching two high-class demons facing off in this way,” Akeno said with a light chuckle from beside me. She certainly looked to be enjoying the match.

She wasn’t wrong, though. Who would’ve imagined that a battle between two high-class demons could’ve unfolded in such a way?

Neither was letting up.

“Take this, Sona!”

“Let’s see what you’ve got, Rias!”

The two of them kept exchanging high-spirited banter. It was like watching something from a sports drama. They were both incredibly fired up!

“Chairwomaaaaan!”

That jerk Saji was cheering from the fence opposite where I was standing. He was even waving a flag embroidered with the words *Student Council*. He really was going all out!

“Take this! Shitori-style spin ball!”

The chairwoman sent the ball flying at Rias with a high-velocity backspin.

“What do you take me for? Try a Gremory-style counter!”

The prez moved to return the ball with her racket, but it suddenly changed trajectory and plummeted to the ground.

What the heck was that?!

“Fifteen to thirty!”

I clicked my tongue as the chairwoman scored.

“Well done, Sona. I expected nothing less from my rival.”

“Heh-heh, I hope you haven’t forgotten that the loser has to treat the winner to the special udon with all the toppings

at Konishiya, Rias?”

“Not at all. I haven’t tried it yet, and I’m not about to let you taste it first. This match is mine! Don’t forget that I have a hundred and eight different styles of magic ball techniques.”

“I accept your challenge. I’ll return every ball that comes into my Shitori Zone!”

They both all but had flames in their eyes… Still…their bet was a little proletarian for two high-class demon ladies.

That wasn’t a bad thing, though. They had been living in the human world for so long that they’d acquired a very human sensibility.

In the end, their arduous, decisive battle stretched so long that both their rackets broke, and they were awarded joint first place.

Any regular racket would’ve crumbled after such an intense rally.

It was finally time for the club matches.

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“B-bloomers…”

I was taken aback by Asia’s appearance. Who wouldn’t have been? She wasn’t wearing the usual school-designated sports shorts but a pair of tiny high-cut gym shorts that hugged her body and exposed her thighs. In Japan, we call them bloomers!

Asia had suddenly vanished just before the club games, and when she reappeared, she was dressed in those bloomers!

Her naked white legs… Her wonderful thighs…! Dammit! They were incredible!

She was red in the face and fidgeting nervously. “Ah, um, Kiryuu said that bloomers were the best thing to wear for dodgeball… Sh-she also said that it would make you happy

if I wore them…”

K-Kiryuuuuuuuuuu! That crazy woman! How had she convinced our cute Asia to wear such a wonderful—no, such an audacious outfit?!

Dammit! The product of the Craftswoman’s machinations was pulling at my heartstrings!

“Is it no good?” Asia asked, embarrassed.

!!! That expression of hers tugged at something inside me.

“No, it’s awesome, Asia. Thank you. Thank you so much!” I said over and over, taking her hands in my own.

She looked at me with uncertainty, as if a question mark was floating over her head.

“Make sure you’re ready, you two!” called Rias. Even after her ferocious tennis match, she was still raring to go.

Truthfully, I was pretty fired up, too, although for different reasons.

“Yep! Asia’s bloomers have filled me with vigor! There’s no way I can lose!”

“A good response, Issei! Do your best, and I’ll make sure you’re generously rewarded!”

Wh-what?! Seriously, Prez?! My whole body was abuzz with some unknown energy!

“Whhhhhoooooaaaaa! Breeeeeaaaaasts!”

There was no way I would lose! The prez’s tits were mine!

Crunch!

“Arghhhhh!” I let out a shriek.

Asia had stomped on my foot.

“Issei, why don’t you hand out those things you prepared now?” she spat in a displeased tone.

She was pouting angrily.

Adorable Asia had learned how to use violence against me. Perhaps she was entering some kind of rebellious phase.

Just as she’d said, however, there was something I

wanted to give to everyone. Heh-heh, I'd spent the whole night making them.

"Everyone! Let's wear these as a team!"

I pulled out a bunch of headbands emblazoned with the words *Occult Research Club*.

"Oh my, you *are* well prepared." The prez was the first to take one of them. "Yes, you're surprisingly dexterous. It's very well made."

"Heh-heh, I've been practicing in secret."

I'd been spending my free time practicing embroidering in preparation for this day.

I didn't have much talent in home economics, but I'd had faith that I would be able to get better with a little daily practice.

My efforts had rewarded me with a new skill. The fruits of my labor were nothing compared to the work of a real pro, of course, but they were good enough.

"…Unexpectedly good job."

Thank you, Koneko!

"Oh dear. I suppose the other club teams have prepared unique items like special hats and uniforms to wear."

"That's right, Akeno! That's why I made them!"

Everyone picked out a band and wrapped it around their heads. I was so happy. All that late-night exertion had paid off.

Kiba hadn't taken one yet. He was still staring off into the distance.

"Here you go, Kiba," I said.

"…U-uh, thanks."

"…We need to concentrate on winning, got it?"

"…Winning? Right… Winning is important."

Huh? He sounded almost like he was talking about something else. I wondered if he was sick.

"Members of the Occult Research Club and the Baseball Club, please make your way to the sports grounds," sounded the announcement.

All right! It's our turn to shine!

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"Aim for Hyoudou!"

"Aughhhhh! Damn you all!" I screamed as I fought to dodge the constant barrage of high-speed balls.

The club competition was underway!

The sport was dodgeball, and our first opponent was the Baseball Club. Strangely, I was the only person they were targeting.

It was simple enough to work.

To any other students, aiming for anyone but me was out of the question.

Rias was one of the Two Great Ladies of Kuou Academy and an incredibly popular idol at our school. Hitting her was right out.

Akeno was the second of the school's Two Great Ladies, and she, too, was an idol. They couldn't target her, either.

Asia was the most popular second-year and a soothing, natural beauty. Plus, she was blond! Aiming for someone like that was practically criminal.

Koneko, with her petite frame, was practically the school's mascot. Going for her would've been seen as bullying.

Kiba may have been the enemy of all the boys at school, but if anyone tried to take him down, they would face the girls' wrath. He was just as much in the clear as the others.

Only I remained as an acceptable target. No doubt the entire enemy team was wondering why I was hanging out in a club of beauties and pretty boys. Heck, they probably decided that they *should* go for me.

Die, dammit! Aim and throw! Go for a head shot! Die, you savage sex fiend!

I could practically hear the Baseball Club thinking those

exact things.

They were trying to eliminate me with extreme prejudice! I could feel their evil thoughts bearing down on me. It wasn't just them, either; it was coming from everyone in the school.

"Die, Isseiiiiiii!"

"Asiaaaaa! Your bloomers are awesome! Issei, dieeeee!"

"Please! Take Hyoudou down! For Rias's sake! For Akeno's sake!"

"Save Asia from that pervert!"

"Drop him! Take him from the right! No, head-on!"

"I'll kill you! Dieeeee! If perverts are welcome in that club, it should be meeeee!"

"You were foolish to think you could escape here alive!"

Spectators were jeering at me from every direction. *Cut it out, you jerks!* Their eyes were all gleaming with murderous intent! Damn it all! How had it come to this?! That bad feeling of mine had been spot-on!

"They're concentrating on Issei!" Rias called out. "Let's play a sacrifice strategy! Issei, this is our chance!"

"I'll do my best, Prez! Dammit! They aren't playing around!"

With Rias counting on me, I couldn't afford to give anything but my all.

Koneko employed a robust defense that kept most of the balls at bay and then destroyed the opposing team with a powerful shot from her delicate arms!

All right! I thought. At this rate, we would cruise to victory! All I had to do now was avoid getting hit!

That's when some fearless baseball guy set his sights on Kiba.

"Damn you! Screw the consequences! You're going down, pretty boy!"

Whoa! That guy hated pretty boys so much that he was willing to go for Kiba rather than me!

Serves him right! The thought came on reflex, but I still

didn’t want one of my teammates to get hit.

“Snap out of it already!” I shouted.

Kiba was still deep in distant thought.

I lunged toward him, trying to shield him from the oncoming strike.

“…Ah, Issei?”

“Ah, Issei?” my ass! I screamed in my mind. What the hell was Kiba doing?!

The ball was closing in! I had no other choice! I was going to have to block it myself!

Unfortunately, the ball’s trajectory suddenly shifted. The projectile fell low to the ground like a forkball. With immense force, it sped straight for my crotch.

Thuuuuump!

!!!

A direct hit!

…My balls… My balls are… Ugh…

Th-the pain sent me falling flat to the ground, clutching my crotch in agony…

…This unparalleled pain… Only boys knew what this felt like…

The other club members ran to my aid. Rias took me in her arms.

“P-Prez… My balls…”

“Don’t worry—we’ve got the ball! Good work, Issei! Now it’s time to hunt down whoever did this to my cute little Issei!”

Her eyes were incredibly severe.

But seriously… My balls… I couldn’t even breathe… Aughhhhh…

“Oh dear. President, I think he’s saying that some other balls are in trouble.”

Th-thank you, Akeno…

The prez, finally realizing the situation, looked taken aback. “—! How dare they! Asia, come here. We can’t let something like this incapacitate him!”

“O-okay. I-is Issei hurt…?”

“Yes, his vitals have taken a hit. I’m sorry about this, but can you take him behind the building and heal him?”

“His vitals? I don’t really understand, but okay!” Asia replied.

“Koneko, take Issei somewhere no one will see him,” Rias instructed.

“…Understood.”

…They were all talking about me, but I was too busy writhing in agony to notice.

“P-Prez, I-I’m sorry I couldn’t be of more use…”

“It’s all right, Issei. You did well. Leave the rest to us,” Rias responded, patting me gently on the cheek.

Augh.

Someone grabbed me by the collar and began to drag me off the field. Unsurprisingly, it was Koneko.

“Issei, hang in there!” Asia called from my side.

“We’ll avenge you, Issei!” came the prez’s angry and high-energy voice from the distance.

I was on the verge of death.

If Rias went all out, she’d wipe the floor with the Baseball Club, even without Koneko…

That was why I retired from my first game early and was taken behind the gymnasium.

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Koneko and Asia brought me to a vacant spot behind the gym… I was still in immense pain…

“Issei, let me heal you. Show me where you’re hurt.”

Th-there’s no way I can do that!

“I—I can’t…!”

“What are you saying?! I can’t heal you if you don’t show me the affected area!”

She was clearly taking this very seriously, but still, that

was out of the question.

It was my balls, you know? If I pulled them out, my you-know-what would stick up as well… There was no way Asia would be able to handle that.

“A-Asia… Please… Let it go…”

“I—I can’t! I’m here to help you…”

Tears were forming in her eyes.

“Asia, please don’t cry… Can’t you just use your Sacred Gear around my waist…? If you do that, it might be enough…”

Asia possessed a Sacred Gear known as the Twilight Healing. It was capable of healing anyone, even demons. It was the lifeline of our Familia, an extraordinary healing ability capable of curing almost any injury in a moment.

While it might have been able to heal the damage without issue, revealing my injury for Asia to see was out of the question.

“I understand… If that’s what you want, I’ll do as you ask.”

What was with that disappointed tone of voice? *I’m sorry, Asia, but I can’t let you see my you-know-what again.*

A warm glow emanated from the palms of her hands. At the same time, the pain throbbing between my legs gradually abated.

…Incredible. What a warm, comforting light… It was as if the pain had never even existed.

So Asia’s Sacred Gear is good for healing damage to my balls, too…

“…What an indescribable scene,” Koneko said with a sigh.

I had to agree.

“Please rest a little, Issei,” Asia said as she sat by my face and lifted my head. Suddenly, the back of my skull pressed against something incredibly soft.

A-are these her thighs?! A—a lap pillow?! S-seriously?!

“You looked like you enjoyed it when the president did

this… I might not be as good as she is, but still…”

That wasn’t true! She was wearing bloomers! This was more like a thigh pillow! It was a dream come true—a lap pillow from a girl in bloomers!

“Um, thank you. Thank you,” I murmured, tears running down my face.

“You’ve been offering your gratitude a lot today, Issei,” Asia said with a light chuckle.

“Victory goes to the Occult Research Club!”

Before long, some good news reached my ears.

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The soft susurrus of rain drummed outside. Fortunately, the tournament had already finished.

Slam!

A dry, rasping sound echoed amid the rain. The prez had delivered a powerful slap, not to me—to Kiba.

“Well? Maybe that woke you up?”

She was clearly angry.

The Occult Research Club had claimed victory. Asia, Koneko, and I had reentered the fray in the middle of the competition, and we’d secured the championship as a team…

The only one who hadn’t contributed anything to the win was Kiba.

Well, he may have contributed a little, but his mind had clearly been elsewhere the entire time. Even during the matches, the prez had been fuming at him.

If her temper hadn’t flared, mine would’ve.

Even after being slapped on the cheek, Kiba remained expressionless and silent.

…Wh-what is going on with him? Is this really the same Kiba? He’d changed so much that he seemed like a completely different person. Where had that pretty boy

with his refreshing smile disappeared off to?

As if he'd heard my thoughts, Kiba suddenly returned to his usual cool expression. "It's fine, isn't it? The Ball Tournament is over. There's no need to practice anymore, and we're free before evenings now, right? I'm a little tired, so I'd like to take a break from the usual club activities. I'm sorry about today. It looks like I'm not quite myself."

"Kiba, you've been acting seriously weird lately, you know?" I said.

"It doesn't concern you," he answered with a cold, artificial smile.

"I'm worried about you," I added.

Kiba let out a forced chuckle. "Worried? About me? Isn't selfishness the way of life for demons? I do apologize for not having served my master appropriately."

I wondered if I should try to say something to him, but what a role reversal that'd be. Normally, he would've been the one trying to calm me down when I said something reckless.

"You can't start acting spacey right when we need to operate as a team. It only causes problems for us. You must realize how badly we got beat last time, right? We need to learn how to compensate for one another's weaknesses. That's what comrades do," I explained.

Kiba's expression darkened. "Comrades…?"

"Right, comrades."

"You're hot-blooded, Issei… But you know, lately, I've been reminding myself of the basics," Kiba admitted.

"The basics?"

"Yeah, that's right. About why I'm fighting."

"Don't you fight for the prez?"

I'd assumed Kiba fought for the same reason I did. I was quickly proven wrong, however.

"No. I live for revenge. I fight to destroy the Holy Sword Excalibur."

His expression was one of powerful determination.

At that moment, I saw for the first time what I knew to be Kiba's true face.

Revenge Knight

I was walking through the pouring rain without even an umbrella.

That was probably best. Perhaps it'd cool my frenzied head.

I'd gotten into a fight with the president.

For the first time since she'd saved my life, I had rebelled against my master. I wasn't worthy of the name Yuuto Kiba.

I hadn't forgotten my quest for revenge against the Holy Sword Excalibur, however. The atmosphere at school had just made it easy to ignore for a while.

I'd made friends, received a new life, and been given a name to call my own. My master, Rias Gremory, had given me a purpose.

Asking for anything more was wrong.

With my quest yet unfulfilled, it seemed immoral for me to exist as my comrades did, though.

Splash.

A sound of water, different from that of the rain, reached my ears.

In front of me stood a priest. It was one of those guys who wore a cross on his chest and muttered holy words in the name of that spiteful God.

People like him were among those I detested the most. They were abominations. If he had been an exorcist, I would've picked a fight with him then and there.

—!

Blood dripped from the priest's abdomen. He spat out a mouthful of crimson vomit before collapsing to the ground.

Did someone attack him? Who? An enemy?

"—!"

Sensing an unusual presence, I summoned up one of my Demon Swords.

All of a sudden, I was hit by a wave of killing intent!

Shinggggg!

A silver burst of light shot through the rain, sending sparks flying.

I turned in the direction of that murderous aura, only to find myself face-to-face with a sword-wielding figure already lunging toward me.

He was dressed in the same type of clothes as the dead clergyman—which meant that he, too, was a priest. This one, however, was consumed by a mad frenzy.

“Hi there. It’s been a while.”

I instantly recognized the young priest with the disgusting grin.

It was the silver-haired psychotic exorcist—Freed Sellzen. Not too long ago, he’d been working with a group of fallen angels.

That freaky smile of his was just as unsettling as ever.

“…So you’re hiding out in this town again? What do you want now? You’ll have to forgive me, but I’m in a particularly bad mood right now,” I spat.

The boy-priest, however, scoffed at my remarks. “What a coincidence! Wonderful timing! I could cry for joy at this dramatic reunion!”

His frivolous voice really grated on my nerves. I hated priests enough as it was, but this guy was something else.

Readying myself, I summoned up a second Demon Sword. At the same time, the longsword that Freed was wielding began to emit a holy aura.

—! That light! That aura! That glint!

I knew it well.

“I was just about sick and tired of hunting priests, so this is perfect! Let’s spice things up. How about we see which has the upper hand, your Demon Swords or my Excalibur? Hya-ha-ha! I’ll take your life as payback for last time!”

Yes, that blade Freed was holding was none other than the Holy Sword Excalibur.

Life.2

The Holy Sword Is Here!

“The Holy Sword Project?”

The prez nodded at my question. “Yes. Yuuto is a survivor of that ill-fated scheme.”

After everything that’d happened during the Ball Tournament, Asia, the prez, and I returned home.

The prez and Asia came into my room, and the former began to explain the situation with Kiba.

“Up until a few years ago, there was a plan within the Christian Church to raise an individual capable of wielding the Holy Sword Excalibur.”

“…This is the first I’ve heard of it.”

Evidently, Asia had never heard of the project. It made sense that the people in charge would keep something potentially scandalous from a revered Holy Maiden.

“Holy Swords are the most powerful weapons against demons. A mere touch can burn us, and a proper blow would prove instantly fatal. For God’s faithful, who see us as mortal enemies, there are no greater weapons.”

Holy Swords… They sounded like the kind of thing you might’ve found in a video game or a novel. As a demon myself, to me, they sounded like the worst thing I could ever go up against.

“There are numerous Holy Swords, each with their own origin story, but the most famous has to be Excalibur. Even here in Japan, countless books mention it. Holy Swords are weapons created by those who manage to reach the realm

of God through a mastery of magic and alchemy. However, they can only be used by a select few individuals. It's said that only one person every few decades has the ability to handle one successfully."

"Kiba's Sacred Gear lets him create Demon Swords, right? Is there a similar Sacred Gear for making Holy Swords?" I asked.

In my haste, it occurred to me that if there was a Sacred Gear for forging Demon Swords, then there would have to be a similar one for creating Holy Swords.

"There are some Sacred Gears that can do that, but the kind of weapons they make don't compare to preexisting Holy Swords. That's not to say that they're weak, however. One of them is a Longinus, just like your Sacred Gear. The True Longinus, the Holy Spear of the Setting Sun—wielded by the man who killed Jesus Christ—is particularly famous. The very word *Longinus* is said to be derived from that weapon."

Longinuses.

They were exceptional Sacred Gears with the power to defeat God. One of them dwelled in my left arm. Rias had just revealed that there were holy Sacred Gears among the Longinuses… One of them was even the spear that had killed Christ… My conversations with high-class demons had a way of suddenly spoiling the mysteries behind deep historical secrets.

"However, Excalibur, Durendal, and Ama-no-Murakumo-no-Tsurugi, the Heavenly Sword of Gathering Clouds of Japanese legend, are especially powerful. No holy Sacred Gear can match those three weapons. The same can be said for Demon Swords, too."

I couldn't really follow what Rias was saying. It sure seemed like the kind of information I needed to know by heart, but lately, there were just too many things to remember…

"Yuuto is one of those individuals artificially raised for

compatibility with Holy Swords. Specifically, Excalibur," Rias explained.

"Does that mean he can wield Holy Swords?" I asked.

The prez shook her head. "Yuuto couldn't acclimatize to them. He wasn't the only one, either. From what I've heard, all his fellow test subjects proved incapable."

Oh…

So even Kiba, with his exceptional swordsmanship and his mastery of so many Demon Swords, couldn't wield a Holy Sword…

"When the Church officials learned that Yuuto and the other test subjects were incompatible, they branded them as defective and disposed of them," Rias continued.

That didn't sit well with me. It wasn't difficult to imagine what something that foreboding meant.

The prez narrowed her eyes, as if recalling something discomfiting. "Many of the test subjects, Yuuto included, were killed simply because they weren't compatible with those accursed weapons…"

"H-how could they do something like that…? No servant of the Lord would willingly engage in such cruelty…" This had all come as a considerable shock to Asia. Her eyes were moist with tears.

Crying seemed a natural reaction after learning that the group you believed in so wholeheartedly had betrayed its ideals so radically.

"Those people in the Church like to call demons evil, but if you ask me, there is no greater evil than human malice." The prez's eyes were tinged with sorrow.

Rias may have been a demon, but she was a gentle soul. Maybe you could say that she had lived in the human world for so long that she had developed human emotions, but there was more to it than that.

She was a naturally kind woman. That much was obvious after witnessing her gentle smile. Even among demons, there were caring people. At least, that was how it seemed

to me.

“When I arrived to revive Yuuto as a demon, he swore vengeance even as he stood on the verge of death. From the moment of his birth, his talents had been wasted on Holy Swords. I wanted to give him the chance to put his skills to proper use as a demon. His swordsmanship is too good to be wasted on Holy Swords.”

The prez must have wanted to save Kiba and offer him a new life as a demon to make up for the one that Holy Swords had made so miserable.

She’d told him to forget about those weapons and to live his life as a demon.

Unfortunately…

“He couldn’t forget,” Rias admitted. “Not about the Holy Swords, the people involved in the project, or those from the Church…”

That explained Kiba’s hatred of priests and why he was so obsessed with information relating to Holy Swords. He clung tight to revenge.

I could understand, though. Those he trusted had toyed with and killed him when they were done. After that fallen angel had killed me, I sure held a grudge against her.

Seeing as the Church had been doing all that to Kiba from such a young age, his enmity definitely ran deep.

The prez let out a deep sigh. “Anyway, I’ll be keeping an eye on him for a while. Right now, his mind is stuck thinking about those Holy Swords. I hope he returns to his usual self soon.”

“Ah, right, about that. I think it was this picture that set him off,” I said, handing the photograph in question to Rias.

Kiba had called the wooden practice blade in the image a “Holy Sword.” It had to be what had set him off.

The prez looked over the photo and then raised an eyebrow. “Issei, do you know anyone affiliated with the Church?”

“None of my relatives are.” I had even asked my parents,

just to make sure. “But I think a Christian kid used to live around here when I was really little.”

“So I was right… To think that a Holy Sword was here only a decade ago. It’s a terrifying thought.”

“Seriously, is that thing really a Holy Sword?”

“Yes. It isn’t as powerful as the three legendary ones I mentioned earlier, but there’s no mistaking the real thing. The man in the picture must be its wielder… It all makes sense now. I always knew my predecessor in this region had been destroyed, and this explains that. But as I recall…” The prez’s voice softened as she began to mumble to herself.

It looked like she’d hit upon something important.

She remained that way for a short while before declaring, “We should get some rest. Dwelling on this won’t help Yuuto.” Having said her piece, Rias began to strip off her clothes.

“P-Prez?! Wh-what are you doing?!” I exclaimed.

She was already down to her underwear when she replied, “What am I doing? You know I can’t sleep unless I’m naked, Issei.”

“N-n-n-n-no! Not that! In my room, I mean!” It was all I could do to stammer out an answer as I looked Rias up and down.

Nghhhhh! No matter how many times I saw it, that body of hers was amazing! She even removed her bra to let her breasts pop out!

“I’m sleeping with you tonight, of course,” Rias stated plainly.

Gah!

Blood spurted from my nose.

Whhhhhoooooaaaaa! A girl just said she wants to sleep with me*!*

“Then I’m staying the night here, too! *I* want to sleep with Issei!” Now it was Asia’s turn to start undressing.

Hey, hey, hey, hey, hey! Y-you don’t know how happy it

makes me to hear you say that, Asia, but you can't! You can't start copying the prez!

"Prez! You're having a bad influence on Asia! Please put your clothes back on!"

Rias frowned at my outburst. "A bad influence? That's a mean way to put it, Issei. You already know that I sleep naked. We've done it together several times."

Asia recoiled in shock. "…H-how many times…? Th-the president and Issei…" She began to tremble. Large tears welled up in her eyes over the sheer magnitude of this revelation.

H-hold on. Just what is going on here?!

"Asia, let me have Issei tonight," Rias requested.

"No… I've earned the right to spoil Issei, too! *I* want to sleep with him!"

Asia! Do you really want me that much?! It was a complicated feeling, but I was overjoyed to hear that!

Her eyes were damp, but they burned with strong resolve. You could practically hear them say, *I won't back down!*

Whoa, two girls are fighting over me in my room! Please stop it, you two!

They continued to glare at each other, their gazes all but sending sparks flying. Caught in the middle, I was finding it hard to breathe. Seriously, I needed air!

"How about we let Issei decide?" the prez said, casting her gaze toward me.

Rias's eyes were demanding that I pick her. Talk about putting me under pressure!

"Issei, you're going to choose me, right?" Asia entreated with a glistening look. The seriousness of her words nearly brought me to my knees.

Whichever one I picked, the other would resent me.

I held my head in my hands. This was the hardest choice I'd ever faced in my life.

—○●○—

"…Phew."

I went down to the kitchen to get a glass of water and to catch my breath.

In the end, the three of us had settled on a compromise: I would sleep together with both of them.

Naturally, I asked the prez to wear pajamas just for the one night. Since she was wearing clothes, Asia did as well.

Rias's influence was really turning Asia into an erotic young woman. I wasn't exactly unhappy about that, but my feelings for her were growing complicated. I had to protect Asia, but she'd been acting so sensual and suggestive around me lately… Perhaps it was a good thing, but I still felt guilty over it. Ugh, my tiny brain couldn't handle this.

The prez and Asia slept on either side of me that night. It was a dream come true! Seriously, what could've possibly been better?! For a guy, it was the absolute best!

Unfortunately, if I laid a hand on Rias, Asia would get mad at me, but if I did anything to Asia, my conscience would torment me for the rest of my life.

It was killing me! Somehow, I'd gotten myself stuck in limbo.

I held my head in my hands, weeping with regret. No way was I going to be able to get any sleep with two beauties flanking me. Resisting the urge to touch their breasts and stroke their thighs, I made my way downstairs at the earliest opportunity. As far as I could tell, they were both sound asleep.

Damn, I wanted to do it with both of them so badly!

Aren't my teenage years supposed to be the most vigorous and romantic time of my life?! I cursed myself for not giving in and sampling all those sensual delights that'd been at my fingertips.

There's nothing wrong with a threesome, right?

Group sex was a given in a harem! It was supposed to be a piece of cake! If I couldn't even manage that much, was I really fit to have my own harem?

If I'd truly had any talent for this kind of thing, I would've been drowning myself in a sea of pleasure with Rias and Asia! That sleepless night had taught me a horrible truth. Even faced with two girls in the same bed, I'd been unable to act on my masculine impulses.

The prez was within my grasp, and I still didn't touch her! Asia was right there, too, but I'd never forgive myself if I defiled her!

What had paralyzed me so? Could it have been inexperience? Had my virginity been the cause?!

Damn it all! My head was practically spinning with hypotheticals of how things could've gone.

Heh-heh, which of you two should I pleasure today?

Master Issei! Choose me! Shower me with your mercy!

What are you saying?! I'm a lascivious creature who can't live without my master's——! Please choose me!

Get out of my way! Please, Issei, I can't hold back anymore! Please! Fill me up and satisfy me!

Ha-ha-ha! Come on now. Cut me some slack! I've only got one body, you know? We'll take it in turns! Let's decide who goes first with a game of rock paper scissors, my darlings!

A perfect scene was playing out in my mind.

Tears streamed down my cheeks. In the end, it was nothing more than a wild delusion.

I wondered when I'd finally get to taste my first real sexual experience. It seemed about time for me to know the embrace of a woman.

Surely, that was right around the corner… I couldn't even count how many times I'd seen bare breasts, after all. That next step was a big one, though.

Ugh, why did this have to happen to me…?

"Yo, kid. Sorry to bother you."

—.

…Of all the things to happen at that moment, I never would've guessed it'd be a call from *him*.

Something dwelled inside my left arm, contained within my Boosted Gear. It was the Welsh Dragon, Ddraig the Red Dragon Emperor. He'd made his presence known back during the Rating Game against Riser Phenex. Because of him, I was able to use my Sacred Gear's ultimate power—its Balance Breaker.

With that new power, I'd been able to defeat Riser and end Rias's engagement to him. In exchange, I'd surrendered my left arm to the Welsh Dragon as payment.

Rias and Akeno had found a way to return my transformed arm to normal, but it required regularly dispelling the dragon power that built up in it.

I'd tried to talk to the Welsh Dragon since the whole Rating Game thing, but he never answered. It was like he was avoiding me!

"Yeah, I guess you could say that. I won't disappear this time. We need to talk."

I sat down on the sofa in the living room.

"What do you want all of a sudden?" I asked.

"Come on—don't say it like that."

Maybe dragon power was building up inside me again. That could've explained why the Welsh Dragon was suddenly reaching out to me.

As it happened, Akeno was scheduled to release the power tomorrow. Heh, I was looking forward to it. Her method was super erotic. Before I realized it, drool was trickling down my chin.

"I see your head is as full of raunchy thoughts as ever," Ddraig muttered with a sigh.

"Shut up! This is a sensitive time for me! Anyway, what do you want to tell me?"

“Oh, we can talk about the fairer sex if you prefer.”

“…You were listening to me?”

“Well, you and I are always together. It’s hard to ignore.”

Ah… So he heard everything. As if that wasn’t bad enough, it seemed like Ddraig could read my mind, at least to a certain extent.

“Gremorys and their Familias are known to be especially forthcoming in their affections. Your master and her servants are no exception there. Rias Gremory, in particular, seems to have taken a great liking to you… It would appear that her adoration for you runs deep.”

“…Yeah, well, she does like to dote on me,” I agreed bashfully.

It was true that Rias was incredibly affectionate with me. That had only increased since my victory over Riser. Come to think of it, she’d taken to embracing me in front of the other club members—her Familia. She even kissed me on the cheek now and then…

I enjoyed her displays of tenderness, but they did get embarrassing at times. I didn’t really know how to handle her.

“Heh, you’re at the right age to learn what it means to love. You’re better off gaining experience sooner rather than later. You never know when the White One might decide to show his face.”

“…Actually, I’ve wanted to ask you about that for a while. Just who exactly is this ‘White One’?”

“The White Dragon. Also known as the Vanishing Dragon.”

—.

The V-Vanishing…Dragon?

Ddraig was the Welsh Dragon. Did that mean there was some kind of connection? *Ddraig is also called the Red Dragon Emperor, so by “White Dragon,” he means…*

As I ruminated, Ddraig continued to explain. *“You know that there was a three-sided war among God and his*

angels, the fallen angels, and demons a long time ago, right?"

"Yeah."

The prez and the other members of her Familia had explained that to me—the basics of it anyway.

"There were a number of other powerful beings who lent their strength to one or more sides. Fairies, spirits, monsters, and phantoms from both Western and Eastern traditions and even humans. Dragons were the only ones who didn't formally align themselves with anyone."

"Why not?" I pressed.

"Why indeed? I don't really recall anymore. But we dragons are powerful and particularly free-spirited and selfish. Some of us chose to side with demons or with the forces of God, but the vast majority didn't care to pay any heed to the war and simply did as we pleased."

Dragons certainly sounded like annoying creatures. Ddraig was making them out to be completely careless.

"Anyway, in the midst of that three-way conflict, two stupid dragons went and started a massive fight. They weren't just any old dragons, either. They were two of the most powerful ones to have ever lived. Their strength rivaled that of God and the Demon King. Unconcerned with the war raging beneath them, those two dragons plowed through all three factions without so much as a second thought. As far as angels, fallen angels, and demons were concerned, there couldn't have been a more meddlesome obstacle. All three groups were earnestly fighting to conquer the world, and these two dragons were laying waste to the battlefield with no thought but for themselves."

Those two dragons sounded like a real pain in the ass!

"What did they have to fight over?"

"Well, I doubt it was anything important. They probably didn't even remember what started it themselves by that stage. Faced with a common threat, for the first time in

history, all three sides joined together. You can probably guess what they were thinking. We can't finish this war unless we get rid of those two dragons first! Let's team up to take them down! *Heh."*

…An alliance of bitter rivals, huh? Plus, it was a fight between dragons that'd brought them together? That must have been a complex situation.

"The two dragons were incensed when the trio of armies interrupted their fight. Who dares to oppose us?! *they thought.* Neither angel nor demon will interrupt our duel! *And so the dragons struck back like a pair of idiots. They tried to devour God, the Demon King, and the chiefs of the fallen angels. You can probably guess how big of a mistake that was."*

Those dragons sounded like the worst, the lowest of the low.

It was becoming increasingly clear, however, that those dragons were—

"In the end, the two of them were carved into pieces, and their souls got sealed into human bodies as Sacred Gears. Even so, the two dragons continued to fight each other time and time again, using their new human vessels as intermediaries. On each occasion, only one would emerge alive. Every now and then, one of them would perish before they could meet, averting a fight, but it almost always ended in direct conflict. When a mortal vessel perished, the dragons—now Sacred Gears—would become inactive until the birth of their next bearer. Things have continued like that for eons."

"This is you and the Vanishing Dragon we're talking about, right?" I asked.

"Yeah. This time, you're my host. And a demon to boot. It's been a long while since I've had a bearer like you. I'm looking forward to seeing how this plays out."

I was never even asked if I wanted to be a vessel, and Ddraig had already decided how my life would go!

If nothing else, I thought it best that I let him know exactly what I hoped to achieve, too.

I cleared my throat before loudly declaring, “Listen up, Ddraig! I’m going to ascend to the rank of a high-class demon and become a harem king! My dream is to amass a Familia of female demon servants. They will be my own private army of incredible beauties!”

Ddraig remained silent for a moment before breaking out into a loud laugh. *“Ha-ha-ha! I’ve never had a host with dreams like that! Most of them have been too proud, power hungry, or cowardly to live a decent life.”*

“Huh? Is there something wrong with me? Am I strange?”

“You’re definitely strange, but there’s nothing wrong with you. In any event, you’re possessed by a dragon. Dragons have been a symbol of power throughout all lands, across all ages. Even if they come in different shapes and sizes, cultures worldwide have produced images and carvings of dragons, no? Humans have admired us, paid homage to us, and feared us since time immemorial. Dragons unwittingly attract the attention of those around us. I suppose you could say that the strong gather at our feet. The power of the dragon will lead you to many who yearn to be with you and just as many who wish to test your might.”

“…That sounds pretty inconvenient, actually. Aren’t you saying that a lot of guys are gonna come after me because of you?” I asked.

“To fight those drawn to strength and power—that is the fate of the vessel of the Dragon Emperor. There is no need to despair, though. Women will flock to your arms, too.”

“S-seriously?!”

“Yes, seriously. My hosts have always been surrounded by members of the opposite sex. They were what you might call ‘irresistible.’ They never had any trouble in that respect.”

“S-so they could have one girl after another?!”

“There were those who slept with a different woman each night.”

Wh-whaaaaat?! My predecessors got to do that kind of thing?! Th-that’s incredible! Wonderful! W-whhhhhoooooaaaaa!

A cry of joy echoed throughout my heart! This was amazing! Seriously amazing!

“W-whhhhhoooooaaaaa… S-seriously… Y-you, Dragon—er, Master Ddraig—I didn’t realize you were such an awesome Sacred Gear!”

I bowed my head to my left arm, murmuring words of obeisance and respect.

People had told me the Boosted Gear was impressive, but I’d always had my doubts. This was a fantastic revelation.

“…And now you’re addressing me with respect… I can safely say I’ve never had such a self-serving vessel.”

“W-well, I’m in no position to be disrespectful to you now, Master Ddraig! Er, thank you for your continued guidance and encouragement! Sir!”

“…You’re a strange kid. But you will prove interesting, I’m sure. In any event, let’s not let the Vanishing Dragon get the better of us—do you hear me?”

“Is he that strong?”

“He is. Originally, our power was enough to surpass God or the Demon King. A curse was placed upon us when we were sealed in these Sacred Gears, however, and now it’s extremely difficult for us to unleash our full potential. That said, you won’t need my full power to destroy even the greatest of demons or fallen angels.”

In that case, if I and whoever had become the vessel of the Vanishing Dragon could master our Sacred Gears, we would become that much stronger. To be honest, though, I wasn’t at all interested in defeating God or any of the current Demon Kings.

The idea of using that power to become a Demon King

and amass an entourage of beautiful ladies was an appealing one, however.

While I was already at odds with the fallen angels, I didn't want to meet with any of their leaders.

Unfortunately, it sounded like meeting this Vanishing Dragon one day was unavoidable.

I could only guess at the identity of the other vessel. It was likely someone I'd never met, but I thought it'd be nice if it was a girl.

Even if we were fated to do battle, I still wanted to live my life to the fullest. No dragon was going to get in my way! I was going to put my all into holding my own against this Vanishing Dragon!

"Anyway, my goal right now is the prez's breasts…"

"What, groping them?"

"No, sucking them!"

"…"

I had laid my deepest desire bare. For some reason, that shut up the Red Dragon Emperor. Had I rendered him speechless?

Paying him no mind, I continued. "The touch of the prez's breasts…I can still feel them in my hands. If I had the chance, I would fondle them all day long! She might even let me! She did say that she would give me a generous reward! But that's not enough! As a man, I have to aim higher! Guys who are satisfied with fondling breasts are second-rate! That's why I'm gonna suck on them!"

"…R-right, well, good luck with that." Ddraig sounded well and truly shocked by my oath.

Still, I was perfectly serious.

"Ddraig, I'm going to need your power again!"

"…To help you suck on a woman's teat…? I've fallen lower than I thought. But it does sound like an amusing diversion. It's good to have a partner like you once in a while."

Ddraig sounded somewhat resigned to his fate, but he

went along with my request. In a weird way, he seemed to take a slightly elevated view of things sometimes.

“All right! Then let’s do this, partner!”

“Very well then, partner.”

So it was that the Red Dragon Emperor and I made a midnight vow to accomplish a new set of goals.

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Removing dragon power from my body required a high-ranking demon who would suck it out and neutralize it.

There were several ways to do this from what I gathered, but the simplest and most reliable one was apparently to extract it directly from my body.

The method used was… Well, how should I put this…? Incredibly stimulating for a sex-obsessed high schooler like me.

The only two demons I knew who were strong enough to do this were Rias and Akeno. They took turns sucking the power out of me on a regular basis.

It was time for my next session, so I’d gone to Akeno’s room on the second floor of the old school building.

The space used to be a classroom, but the floor had been covered in tatami mats and now resembled a traditional Japanese-style room.

Strange symbols that resembled magic insignias decorated the place, as did a number of objects that looked like they were used for casting maledictions.

I was waiting in the center of that room, naked from the waist up. Beneath me was a magic circle. Apparently, it was a necessary component of the ritual.

From what I was told, removing my shirt was also an essential part of the process.

The door to the room swung open as a figure stepped inside. It was Akeno. She was dressed in a loose white

gown.

Her hair, normally tied back in a ponytail, was hanging loose and free. She wore it down every time we did this. It was pretty bewitching and enthralling, actually!

She flashed me a brief smile before quietly sitting opposite me with a mysterious look.

“We’re ready. Shall we get started?” she asked.

U-um, Akeno…

The white gown she was wearing…was soaked with water! Her long dark hair was clinging to her body, too! It was incredibly sensual! I could practically see through her clothes!

Witnessing Akeno like that forced a certain masculine phenomenon to overtake me…

I could see it! Right through her gown! A glorious shade of pink! Her nipple was peeking through that white cloth! Was she seriously not even wearing a bra?!

“Oh dear, whatever is the matter? You’ve fallen silent all of a sudden… Don’t you like my outfit? If you’re wondering why I’m wet, I had to soak myself for the ritual. Does it bother you?” Akeno paused, deliberately stroking her chest with her hand.

I could feel something pulsating between my legs…

“No, not at all! It looks great on you!” I hurriedly exclaimed.

I couldn’t help but stare at her breasts.

That translucent cloth was too intense… *Huh? Don’t tell me she’s naked down below, too…?*

My gaze turned down to Akeno’s hips.

I was speechless. She really *was* naked…probably.

She wasn’t the least bit embarrassed, nor did she try to cover herself. Heck, judging by her expression, she looked to be enjoying this!

“Shall we begin? Issei. Hold out your left arm.”

“R-right! Th-thank you for doing this!”

To dispel the dragon power inside me, Akeno had to…

“I will draw out the dragon power accumulated in your arm by sucking directly on your fingers. Once I’m finished, your arm will temporarily return to its original shape.”

Yep, the technique involved literally sucking the dragon power directly from my body. In my case, Rias and the prez both used their mouths to extract it through my fingers.

Slurp…

With an obscene sound, Akeno took my index finger and inserted it into her mouth.

…Ugh, I didn’t have the words to describe what an attack on the senses it was.

I’d gone through this a few times already, but I still couldn’t get over how incredible the soft, warm, moist sensation of a girl’s mouth was!

Akeno wasn’t just sucking on my fingertip… She was putting real force into it!

It felt really, really good! Damn! My mind was taking me to lewd places!

It was too good to be true.

Suddenly I’d become the star of a scene from a porn DVD!

Slurp, guzzle, gulp…

It almost seemed like Akeno was deliberately making those lewd sounds, as if trying to savor my reactions to the fullest!

I couldn’t move at all. I just sat there, my face blushing in ecstasy, letting the pleasure of that incredible sensation whisk me away.

Ah, I’ll remember this for the rest of my life!

After thinking about it for a moment, I realized that we’d probably have to keep doing this regularly forever.

Whhhhhoooooaaaaa!

This was a new high! If I hadn’t given up my human arm for a dragon one, I would never have been able to enjoy this!

Ddraig! I owe this triumph all to you!

It was such an erotic situation, but I could feel the power in my left arm surging as, little by little, it flowed through my fingertips and out of my body.

As it did so, my arm gradually began to feel lighter. It grew nimbler and more flexible.

I felt Ddraig's presence fading inside me, too. Maybe I really was only able to communicate with him when I had a lot of dragon power in me.

My thoughts were suddenly interrupted as—

Lick.

"Ahn…"

A moan of pure pleasure escaped my lips!

Look, I couldn't help it, okay? Akeno had started licking the tip of my finger with her tongue!

Out of nowhere, her tongue was rippling between my fingers!

A-Akeno?!

When I glanced at her face, I saw that she was wearing a mischievous grin. She had clearly gone into full-on sadism mode!

A thread of saliva dripped from my finger as it left her mouth.

Whaaaaa—?! This is way too lewd!

"Oh dear. If you keep acting so cute and innocent, you're going to make me want to take this little service even further."

"S-service?"

"Yes. There's nothing wrong with doting on one's underclassman, is there now?"

She moved on to the next finger, edging her body closer.

Whaaaaa—?! A-Akeno! H-hold on! What are you doing?!

She ignored my obvious panic, however. With a bewitching, mesmerizing smile, Akeno wrapped her arms around me in a hug!

The scent of her lustrous black hair filled my nostrils. She was letting off a delightful feminine fragrance that made my manhood quiver in excitement!

I was already naked from the waist up, so I could feel her female flesh directly through that soaked gown of hers!

The water left the fabric cool to the touch, but it didn't drown out the warmth of her body. That temperature difference was so erotic that it made my head spin!

H-her body is so soft…!

What's more, there was only a flimsy piece of cloth between her breasts and me…

Spurt!

Blood suddenly gushed from my nose! How could it not have? No matter how many liters of that life-giving liquid flowed from my nasal cavity, it wouldn't have been enough!

"I'm really interested in you, Issei, even like this," Akeno whispered alluringly in my ear.

"I-in me?"

"Yes, I thought you were cute the moment I first saw you. But lately, my feelings have evolved. During your fight with the Phoenix, I watched you from a monitor in the treatment room as you pulled yourself up again and again."

Ah, right. Akeno had been retired from the battlefield before the match had concluded. Those knocked out in a Rating Game were sent to a special area set aside for medical treatment.

"And then you stormed into the engagement party to rescue the president and defeated the supposedly immortal Riser all by yourself. It's quite arousing, seeing a gentleman perform so magnificently in combat."

"A-arousing…?"

Akeno looked me squarely in the eye and let out a light giggle. "Sometimes, when I think about you, a warm feeling rises up in my chest. And when I'm entertaining you like this, Issei, my teasing instincts take over… Perhaps this is what it feels like to be in love?"

L-love?! Wait, is she teasing me?! Does that make this sexual harassment?! The world sure is filled with unexpected marvels!

"But if I was to lay a hand on you, I might upset Rias. She really… Well… You're important to her. Hee-hee, you're

quite the sinful boy, Issei."

…Sinful? M-me? I was ready to suffer any punishment I deserved if it meant more time like this with Akeno.

Wait, did Akeno just call the prez by her name?

Maybe they referred to each other by their first names in private? They'd known each other longer than any other members of the prez's Familia.

At that moment, Akeno put a hand behind my neck!

That's not all—she was deliberately letting her gown slip off! I could literally see the plump, peach-colored tip of her right nipple! She was boldly baring her legs to me, too!

"Would you be willing to have an affair with me?"

"A-an affair?!"

Behind whose back?! Th-that's such an incendiary word!

"Oh-ho, don't worry. I know how to keep a secret from the president and Asia. You're burning with desire, no? This can be our little secret."

Gah!

My nose wouldn't stop gushing blood!

"I want to know what it feels like to be carnally devoured by a younger man, at least once. This might surprise you, but I like to be an masochist sometimes, too. And I've been thinking it's about time that I took a man inside me."

C-cut it out, please… Th-those poison words are super effective against me… Hold on—what did she say…?

"Akeno, are you saying that you're…?"

"Yes, I'm a virgin. Heh, I'm sure you have much more experience than I do, Issei, so I would love it if you could take the lead."

"Th-that's… I mean, I… I don't have any experience, either…"

Akeno looked startled at my embarrassed confession. "Oh? That *is* a surprise. I was sure you'd done it with the president…"

"I haven't! I mean, I don't even know if I'm the right person for her first time!"

“Oh dear. I wouldn’t have expected the president to fall behind the curve. What about Asia, then?”

“No!”

I couldn’t lay a hand on either of them. Although the exact reasons why were a bit different. I’d decided entirely on my own that it was unforgivable for me to defile someone like Asia, who I’d sworn to protect.

“I thought the president said that she had a ‘generous reward’ in store for you each and every night…? Oh dear, this *is* a surprise.”

Ugh, what was that supposed to mean?! She was talking about the kind of situation where a high school kid could have his myriad sexual desires satisfied all at once, right?!

“Don’t you want to do it with them, Issei?”

“Of course I want to! So much! I have to fight the urge to push the prez down on my bed! I’ve never been able to make it to the finish line, and I end up crying myself to sleep every night! I want to have sex with the prez *and* Asia!”

That was it. I’d laid my heart plain for Akeno. It might’ve sounded ridiculous, but it was how I really felt. I was a healthy boy living with two beautiful young ladies. Obviously, I was lusting after both of them.

“You poor thing… Oh dear, they do sound rather slow in taking the initiative… There shouldn’t be anything stopping either if they really want to do it with you. I suppose it’d be wrong of me to take your chastity, but if you gave me permission…”

…Uh-oh. Was she going to go all the way? Maybe I’d said too much? *Am I about to graduate from being a virgin? Have I made some kind of terrible miscalculation?*

All of a sudden, the door to the room burst open. Standing in the doorway was the prez. She was scowling at us.

“Akeno, what is the meaning of this?” she demanded as she approached, her voice seething with displeasure.

…Whoa, sh-she’s seriously upset…

“Hmm? I’m just extracting Issei’s dragon power,” Akeno replied nonchalantly with a carefree smile.

“…Really? No matter how you look at this…it seems like you’re trying to take things somewhere else.”

“Oh dear, you didn’t think that we were actually going to move on to the real thing, did you?”

“Even if you weren’t, you’re taking this too far. I still haven’t…” The prez’s voice trailed off.

“Aren’t you moving a little too slowly, President? It’s fine to study your books, but real life isn’t like following a manual.”

“…”

“…”

The two of them glared menacingly at each other. Okay, maybe they didn’t go that far, but they were definitely trying to stare each other down.

I could literally feel their intensity.

The atmosphere had grown very tense all of a sudden. I hurried to put on my shirt, being extra careful not to bump into Rias or Akeno.

No sooner had I done so than the prez turned her scowl to me and pinched me hard on the cheek.

“Seems you enjoyed yourself today, Issei. Did you get to know more about your dear upperclassman lover Akeno?”

“I—I wasn’t…”

Rias was still pulling at my cheek, so I could hardly get my words out. Even if she hadn’t been, it wasn’t very manly of me to make excuses. Akeno might’ve had me at her mercy, but I’d been a willing participant.

The prez puffed out her cheeks as if to say, *Do whatever you want!* and then turned heel and stormed out of the room.

Slam!

She threw the door shut behind herself with tremendous force.

It was pretty obvious that she was furious. The question

was: Why? Was it because things were leaning toward a lewd development between Akeno and me?

I must have been wearing my bewilderment on my sleeve, as Akeno whispered, “She’s cute when she’s jealous. Hee-hee. Perhaps this will help advance your relationship.”

What’s that supposed to mean? What is going to “advance”?

Had the prez thought that she was going to lose me to Akeno? No matter what happened, I was always going to be her servant, never Akeno’s…

That said, Rias really was cute when she puffed her cheeks out angrily like that, just like Asia.

—○●○—

After a long day of schoolwork and club activities, Asia and I were on our way home.

Normally, the prez would have joined us, but not today.

That incident with Akeno was definitely to blame.

I’d actually asked Rias if she was going to walk home with us, but she hadn’t even looked at me when she’d answered, “Later. You go first.”

Her tone had been barbed.

Ugh, does she hate me now? It pained me even to consider the possibility.

Maybe this was how a pet dog felt when it had angered its owner. Sad… Forlorn…

“The president isn’t coming with us?” Asia asked.

“Hmm? Oh… I guess I upset her…”

“…What happened?” Asia inquired, clearly worried.

There was no way that I could tell her without making the situation even more complicated.

“It was my fault. I’ll apologize later. You don’t need to worry about it, Asia.”

“…All right. But it might be my fault. I’ve been talking

back to her a lot lately…" Asia's voice was apologetic.

There was no mistaking that she saw the prez as her rival, but I was certain that didn't have anything to do with Rias's sour mood.

No, it's what happened with Akeno that caused this…

"It's okay. I don't think she's upset with you. I did something I shouldn't have," I assured.

I was such a pervert…

I had thought that the prez had taken a tolerant view of my sexual inclinations. She'd never said anything against my dream of becoming a harem king, after all.

It was strange. She'd been acting a little weird lately. Perhaps that was just because she was possessive of her servants.

It was like the mixed feelings you'd get if someone else took care of your beloved pet. Even if the prez doted on me, I was still *her* servant.

Ugh… If just one girl could get to me like this, what chance did I have of ever becoming a harem king?! *Dammit!* I thought. *Is this why I've never been popular with the ladies?!*

Who could've imagined that a maiden's heart was so complex? If I couldn't plumb their depths, I'd never be able to surpass those pretty boys!

Thoughts were still tumbling about in my head when Asia and I arrived home. Before I could open the front door, however, an inexplicable chill caught hold of me.

Brrrrr…

The feeling was strange. It was like my whole body was signaling imminent danger…

I'd felt the same thing outside the church when I'd first met Asia. The sight of that building had made my body tremble in trepidation.

Squeeze.

Quaking, Asia latched on to my hand. It looked like she was sensing the same thing I was.

Our demon senses were sounding alarms in our minds.

Just who is in my house? Don't tell me—Mom! An image of my mother in mortal peril flashed through my mind. With urgency, I threw open the front door.

Quickly kicking off my shoes, I dashed for the kitchen.

This can't be happening! Mom! Did someone find out that I'm a demon?! Who?! A fallen angel? God? A regular angel? Someone from the Church? All of them are incredibly dangerous! They'll cut down anyone with even a passing connection to me without so much as a second thought!

The image of that potential client who'd been butchered by the psycho priest Freed Sellzen surfaced in the back of my mind.

I can't let that happen to my mom! Dammit! Whoever you are, quit screwing with me!

Mom wasn't in the kitchen. Something that sounded like laughter echoed from the living room.

I hurried there as fast as my feet could carry me. I was greeted by the sight of my mom chatting with two unknown women.

"And this is Issei from back in his elementary school days. See here—this was when he tore his swimming trunks in the pool. Oh, it was terrible. Even with that gaping hole in them, he still went down the waterslide."

"…M-Mom?" I murmured.

Perhaps having realized I was watching, she turned toward me. "Ah, welcome home, Issei. What's wrong? You look pale."

"Ah… Thank goodness…" Behind me, Asia sank to the floor with a muted *thud*.

It was a huge relief to find that my mom was safe, but I still couldn't shake my feeling of unfathomable unease.

That was only natural. My mother's two guests were both wearing crosses around their necks. They looked to be about my age.

The first was a chestnut-haired beauty, while the second had frightening eyes and one green highlight in her hair. They were both quite attractive, but I could tell from their mannerisms that they were no ordinary visitors.

Both were wearing white robes. Surely, that meant they were associated with the Christian Church.

Are they exorcists? This isn't good. We couldn't afford to fight here, not in front of my own mother.

"Hello there, Issei Hyoudou," said the chestnut-haired girl with a smile.

The other young woman had a long object wrapped in cloth attached at her waist.

That was it—the source of the tremendous sense of danger that continued to wash over me. My skin had goose bumps. It was probably some kind of demon-slaying weapon.

"Nice to meet you," I answered with a forced smile.

The chestnut-haired woman raised an eyebrow in consternation. "Oh? Don't you remember? It's me," she insisted, pointing to herself.

…Huh? I had no recollection of ever meeting anyone like her before.

As I fumbled for a response, my mom held out a picture. It was the one of me, the other boy, and the man with the Holy Sword.

My mom pointed to the kid in the image, the one I'd been friends with back when I was small. "This is her. Irina Shidou. I was surprised as well. You were so boyish back then, and now look what a fine young lady you are!"

…What? Sh-she's the kid in the picture? My childhood friend? Whaaaaa—?! The kid in the picture is a girl?! I-I'd always thought she was a guy!

"It's good to see you, Issei. Did you mistake me for a boy? I guess it can't be helped. I was a real troublemaker back then, always trying to outdo the actual boys. It seems like we've both changed a lot since we last saw each other. I

suppose you never know what you might find when you reunite with a long-lost friend."

Her words were hinting at something deeper. She knew I was a demon.

—○●○—

"I'm glad you're both all right," the prez said as she embraced Asia and me.

Irina Shidou and the other girl from the Church had stayed to chat for around thirty minutes before leaving.

This was Irina's first time back in Japan in many years. Returning to her childhood hometown had left her feeling nostalgic, and she'd decided to drop by the house of her old friend.

She'd said her family had moved to England because of her parents' jobs. No matter how you looked at it, her folks must've been involved with the Church.

Asia and I tried to stay out of the conversation as much as possible, leaving my mom to handle it. More than anything, I really didn't want Asia coming into contact with anyone from the Church. I asked her to take care of something upstairs so she could retreat to her room.

I was prepared to fight if it came to that, but it never did, thankfully.

The prez arrived home a little later. She burst inside, her face as pale as Asia's and mine had been.

After making sure that we were both okay, she immediately went to hug us.

"Are you hurt? They didn't do anything to you, did they? Issei? Asia?" She was genuinely concerned.

"W-we're all right," I answered. "It seemed like they knew we were demons, but my mom's just a regular human, so I don't think they wanted to risk doing anything with her around."

“We’re both okay, President,” Asia added in assurance.

Rias hugged us both tighter still, as if she didn’t want to let us go. “Ah, Issei. Thank goodness… If something was to happen to you and Asia, I… Sona wanted to speak to me after club activities, so I was with her. Members of the Church have infiltrated the town. And they have Holy Swords.”

Rias had stayed late because of her talk with the chairwoman, but on the road coming back, she’d sensed an unsettling presence emanating from the house and had rushed inside.

The prez readily admitted that she had blanched with fear when she realized that a holy weapon had been brought into the house. She was rattled.

“I assumed the worst. It was terrifying to think that my cute little servants might have come to harm… If anything had happened, I would’ve regretted it until the day I died arguing with you earlier. I’m sorry. I should have taken better care of you both…”

Gremorys are known to be especially forthcoming in their affections.

Ddraig’s words from the previous night echoed in my mind.

I could see that to be true. When Rias realized we were safe, she let out a sigh of relief and broke down in tears. She really had been fretting about us.

She’d had a minor clash with Asia earlier and then gotten angry with me. Asia and I had both felt guilty at upsetting her.

It looked like the prez had been just as troubled over that as we were.

“President, I’m sorry for talking back to you. I thought you were going to take Issei…and I didn’t want to lose…,” Asia apologized.

Rias flashed her a smile, patting her on the head. “It’s okay,” she assured, embracing us both in a warm hug.

I could feel her love. Maybe now was a good chance to come out with a special request?

“Prez, your breasts.”

“Yes, I know, Issei. You’re such a sweetheart—”

“No!” Asia interrupted, pulling us apart.

Ngh, they had felt so good, though.

The three of us took a moment to cool down. Rias then cleared her throat before resuming her explanation of recent events. “According to Sona, who encountered those two girls earlier today, they want to negotiate with me, as this town falls within my territory.”

“People from the Church want to negotiate with a demon?” I asked.

The prez nodded.

That was surprising. The Church viewed demons as their enemies. Wondering what they could want, I asked, “Are they here to make a pact? A request?”

“…I don’t know what they’re planning, but they will be paying us a visit in the clubroom tomorrow after school. Apparently, they swore before God that they wouldn’t attack us in any way,” Rias replied.

“Do you trust them?”

“We don’t have a choice. We have to give them the benefit of the doubt. It can’t be easy for *true believers* like them to ask *wicked* demons like us for help, so whatever they want, it must be serious. I have a bad feeling about it, though… Supposedly, priests visiting this town have been slaughtered one after another.” The prez’s eyes narrowed. Her expression was troubled.

…That was frightening. Even that psycho priest Freed Sellzen had despised us with all his heart. Surely, a true believer hated our kind even more.

Something was about to happen. I could feel it.

Even an inexperienced demon like me could sense that much.

—○●○—

After school the following day, we members of Rias Gremory's Familia gathered in the clubroom.

The prez, Akeno, and the two young women from the Church occupied the sofas.

The rest of us were gathered in one corner of the room, watching the guarded exchange between Rias and the two Church officials.

From the moment the women entered the clubroom, I found myself overcome with a chilling sense of trepidation. That was undoubtedly my demon instincts warning me of the danger that the pair posed to us.

Both Rias and Akeno wore solemn expressions.

It was Kiba, however, who made me the most uneasy. He was glaring at the two women with a look of vengeful enmity. It gave the impression that he wouldn't hesitate to cut them both down if something was to happen. Honestly, he almost looked ready to do that for no reason at all.

Kiba despised active adherents of the Church. Considering his history with the organization, he was undoubtedly brimming with hatred right around now.

Amid this atmosphere, it was one of our two visitors who broke the silence—Irina Shidou.

"Several days ago, the Holy Sword Excalibur, guarded by the Catholic Church at the Vatican and by the Protestant and Orthodox Churches at their headquarters, was stolen."

Excalibur was stolen? And what's all that about Catholics and Protestants…?

Then I remembered learning something about the different sects of Christianity once in school.

How could Excalibur have been taken from the Catholic, Protestant, and Orthodox Churches all at the same time, though? It could've only been kept in one place, right?

"The original Excalibur no longer exists," the prez

explained, as if in response to my unasked questions.

Seriously, it was like she was reading my mind.

“I’m sorry,” Rias apologized. “My servant has only recently become a demon, so would you mind if we explained the history of Excalibur?”

Irina nodded in acquiescence before turning in my direction. “Issei, Excalibur was broken long ago, during the Great War.”

Huh? Broken? A Holy Sword? But I thought it was supposed to be pretty famous?

“This is what it looks like now,” continued the other woman with the green highlight in her hair. She lifted the weapon from her waist and pulled back the cloth, revealing a single long blade.

“This is an Excalibur.”

Shiver.

As I looked the thing over, a terrible chill ran through my flesh.

Terror. Apprehension. Awe.

The mere sight of that one thing was enough to fill me with unspeakable dread. It was bad. Seriously bad.

I could tell right away that if I were to touch that weapon, I would be killed instantly!

So this is a Holy Sword? This is one of those lethal weapons used against us demons?

“Excalibur was shattered during the Great War. Its fragments have since been brought back together and reforged into seven new swords through the art of alchemy. This blade is one of them.”

That meant it wasn’t the original Excalibur but rather a new version that had been assembled from some of its remains.

“This is Excalibur Destruction. It is one of the seven Holy Swords forged from the original weapon, and it currently belongs to the Catholic Church.”

Having introduced her blade, the woman with the single

green highlight returned it to its cloth.

On closer inspection, that cloth looked to be covered in arcane, letter-like glyphs. *Some kind of seal, maybe?* Regardless, the sword was undoubtedly a dangerous item.

Next, Irina pulled what looked like a long cord from her pocket.

Then it began to move, as if it had a mind of its own.

Before my very eyes, it unraveled into the shape of a Japanese katana.

“Mine is Excalibur Mimic. It can change its form freely, so it’s very convenient and easy to carry around. Each of the Excaliburs has its own unique power. This one belongs to the Protestants.” Irina’s voice was filled with pride.

As I’d feared, that second Excalibur filled me with the same sense of dread as the first. It, too, was a deadly weapon to us demons.

“Irina… There’s no need to divulge the unique abilities of your Excalibur to these demons, is there?”

“Oh, Xenovia. They may be demons, but we won’t get anywhere if we don’t establish a relationship of mutual trust, will we? Besides, my weapon won’t be left at a disadvantage even if our demon friends know about its abilities.”

Irina was brimming with confidence that she would never lose to one of us.

Still, there were two legendary Excaliburs in this very room!

Whoa! This is heavy stuff!

It was at that moment that I realized the immense sense of pressure emanating from beside me.

It was Kiba.

He was glaring at the weapons—and our two guests—with a demonic hatred I had never seen before.

Kiba bore a special grudge against Excaliburs. He’d probably never dared to imagine two of them would show up here.

It was probably taking all he had not to lash out.

Calm down, Kiba! Don't do anything foolish!

The prez was earnestly trying to negotiate with a hostile organization. If Kiba did anything to jeopardize that, we'd all be screwed! He had to watch himself, or we'd all get caught up in a fight. I'd never fought them myself, but I could tell there was no way we could go up against two Excaliburs without suffering some losses.

"…And what do these stolen Excaliburs have to do with this town in a country on the far side of the world?" Rias asked, unfazed.

That was our prez! Even faced with two Holy Swords, her attitude was as confident as ever! She was holding her ground.

The girl with the scary eyes and streak of green, Xenovia, was the one to respond. "Including the weapon I am currently holding, the Catholic Church possesses two of the remaining seven swords. The Protestants have another pair, as does the Orthodox Church. The seventh and final blade was lost during the Great War between God, demons, and the fallen angels. Of those six remaining weapons, one from each Christian sect was stolen. From what we understand, the thieves escaped to Japan—to this very town."

Hey, hey, is she saying that this town is now the favorite haunt of a bunch of Holy Sword thieves?!

The prez placed a hand on her forehead and let out a sigh. "My territory is always full of surprises. So who were these thieves?"

At this question, Xenovia's eyes narrowed. "The Watchers of the Children of God—the Grigori."

Rias's eyes opened wide in surprise. "An organization that serves the fallen angels was behind the robbery? That goes beyond any ordinary slipup. But if there were anyone who would want to take those weapons, it *would* be the fallen angels. Holy Swords are of little interest to demons."

"We know who the main culprit was. It's a man named

Kokabiel, a leader of the Grigori."

"Kokabiel… He's one of the top fallen angels and a survivor of the war… I hadn't expected you to give me a name from the Bible." The prez broke into a soft chuckle.

Wait, hold on! One of the leaders of the fallen angels?! A single guy stole three *Excaliburs?!* This was more than I could handle. Why had Irina and Xenovia come to *us*? They didn't expect us to team up, did they?

"We've sent several priests to this town, hoping to infiltrate their group and locate the Excaliburs. They were all murdered."

Seriously? Such *violent incidents have been going on right under our noses…? Does this mean Irina and Xenovia* are *asking for help? What other reason could they have for seeking an audience with the high-class demon who rules this territory?*

Before I had time to wonder any further, Xenovia laid it out plainly.

"Our request—or rather, our demand—is that none of the demons who inhabit this town interferes in our battle against the fallen angels responsible. In other words, we've come here to warn you not to interfere in this matter."

The prez raised an eyebrow in surprise at Xenovia's manner of speaking. "That's quite the way of putting it. Is that meant as a diversionary tactic? You don't honestly believe that we would have anything to do with the fallen angels, do you? The very idea that we would join forces with them to steal a Holy Sword…"

"Our superiors don't think that outside the realm of possibility," Xenovia affirmed.

The prez's eyes seethed with a chilling iciness. She was seriously angry now!

That was understandable. Two representatives from an enemy faction had come all this way, stepped foot in her territory, insisted she not get involved in what they were doing, told her not to talk back to them, and suggested that

she might have forged an alliance with the fallen angels. Her pride as a high-class demon wouldn't allow her to keep silent after such provocations.

"Our superiors trust neither fallen angels nor demons. The forces of God losing their Holy Swords would be cause for celebration among demons, wouldn't it? You have as much to gain from our loss as the fallen angels themselves. As such, it wouldn't be surprising to learn of an alliance. Thus, we are giving you this warning: We will annihilate anyone who in any way assists the fallen angel Kokabiel. That includes the sister of the Demon King himself. Those were our superiors' orders." Xenovia's tone of voice was unabashedly indifferent to Rias's icy glare.

"…The fact that you know who my brother is means you must have connections with people in high places. In that case, allow me this response: I will never ally with any fallen angel. Never. In the name of the House of Gremory, I swear that I would never insult our Demon King with such treachery."

The two of them glared at each other defiantly.

A moment later, however, Xenovia let out a soft laugh. "That's good to hear. You should know that with Kokabiel lurking in this town with three of the Excaliburs, if anything was to happen, we, and the Church authorities, too, would be held accountable. That said, I won't ask for your help. If a demon, particularly the sister of one of the Demon Kings, were to join forces with us, that would upset the balance of power among the three factions."

At this, the prez's expression relaxed somewhat, and she let out a slight sigh.

The conversation between the two of them was a bit too much for me to follow.

"And what about the representative from the Orthodox Church?" the prez asked.

"They are on standby. Should Irina and I fail, their task is to defend to the death the one remaining Excalibur."

“So the two of you are going to retrieve the Excaliburs from one of the leaders of the fallen angels alone? That seems quite reckless. Do you have a death wish?” Rias inquired, her voice sounding especially dumbfounded.

Irina and Xenovia, however, stared back with determination in their eyes.

“Yes,” replied the former.

“I am one with Irina on this. That said, I would prefer not to die.”

“Are you saying that you came to Japan ready to lay down your lives? I see that your faith continues to defy all common sense.”

“Please don’t mock our beliefs, Rias Gremory,” Irina responded. “Xenovia?”

“I suppose so. The Church has decided that it would prefer to destroy the Excaliburs rather than let them remain in the hands of fallen angels. At the bare minimum, our task is to ensure that the fallen angels cannot use the weapons. We’re willing to throw down our lives to accomplish that, if that’s what it takes. Excaliburs are the only weapons that can stand up against other Excaliburs.”

Talk about determination. Was it their faith that fed this resolve?

It was pretty amazing. That said, I couldn’t sympathize at all. Did they truly want to die for God that badly?

“Can the two of you really pull it off alone?” Rias pressed.

“We don’t intend to die in vain,” Xenovia stated fearlessly.

“That’s quite the confidence. Do you have a secret weapon in your arsenal?”

“Well. I’ll leave that to your imagination.”

“…”

“…”

Rias and Xenovia glared across the room at each other, bringing the conversation screeching to a halt.

Irina and Xenovia glanced meaningfully at each other before rising to their feet.

“It’s about time we got on our way. Irina, let’s go,” Xenovia declared.

“Oh? Won’t you stay for a cup of tea? I would be happy to prepare a snack for you,” the prez offered.

“That won’t be necessary,” Xenovia declined with a wave of her hand.

“I’m sorry. Until next time,” Irina bid.

Refusing Rias’s hospitality, the two of them turned to leave—but not before their gazes fell to where Asia was sitting.

“I thought I recognized you back at Issei Hyoudou’s house. You’re the witch Asia Argento, right? I never would’ve expected to meet you here,” said Xenovia.

Asia visibly trembled at the sound of the word *witch*. That title clearly summoned up painful memories for her.

Perhaps noticing Asia’s reaction, Irina stared intently at her. “So you’re the former Holy Maiden who had everyone up in arms. Your healing ability works on demons and fallen angels, no? I’d heard of your exile, but it’s quite the surprise to discover you’ve been made a demon.”

“…U-uh… I…,” Asia stammered, unable to respond to the pair’s inquisition.

“Don’t worry. I won’t tell any of our superiors that we saw you here. I’m sure that former followers of the Holy Maiden would be shocked to learn about your current situation.”

“…”

Irina’s comment left Asia with a complicated expression.

“A former Holy Maiden is now a demon. How far they fall. Do you still have faith in our Lord?”

“How could she, Xenovia? She’s a demon,” Irina stated with an exasperated look.

“No, I can smell it on her. Faith. That might be an abstract way of putting it, but I’m sensitive to these things. There are those who betray the Lord only to find themselves racked with guilt over their actions and unable

to forget their devotion. I get that sense from her." Xenovia's eyes narrowed as she stared at Asia.

Irina lit up with curiosity. "Is that so? I wonder if Asia truly believes in Him now that she wears demon flesh."

Asia's expression turned sorrowful. "…I haven't abandoned Him. I've always believed…"

At this, Xenovia thrust her cloth-wrapped bundle toward the former nun. "I see. In that case, you won't mind if I cut you down here and now. I shall execute you in the name of the Lord. Sinful though you may be, He should forgive you if you are pure of spirit."

An indescribable feeling welled up deep inside me.

As Xenovia approached, I stood myself between her and Asia.

"Don't touch her," I declared in a clear, unmistakable tone. "If you come any closer, I won't hold back. You called her a witch, didn't you?"

"I did. It's what the Church regards her as."

H-how dare she…! I found myself grinding my teeth in rage at Xenovia's high-and-mighty attitude.

"Don't you dare say that! Not a single one of you did anything to help her when she needed it! You people don't appreciate her inner kindness! None of you would even be her friend! How is that supposed to be in the name of good?!"

"Do you think a Holy Maiden needs friends? Her only concern should've been fulfilling her charitable duties. Anyone seeking friendship is unfit to be a Holy Maiden. The love of the Lord should be enough. I guess Asia Argento was never truly qualified to be a Holy Maiden." Xenovia spoke as if lecturing a child who ought to have known better.

Damn her! What is wrong with these people?!

I couldn't understand them! I didn't want to understand them! How could they possibly say that Asia was the one at fault?!

"So you people just decided to hold her up as a Holy

Maiden all by yourselves and then abandoned her because she didn't meet your idiot expectations…?! Can't you see that's messed up?!"

I couldn't hold back anymore. I'd wanted to get this off my chest for a while. Now that I had some followers of God in front of me, I couldn't resist telling them off.

"You people have no idea what she suffered! What kind of God is He even supposed to be?! Where is this love of His?! Your God did absolutely nothing when she needed Him most!"

Xenovia smirked coolly as she replied, "The Lord loves her. If nothing happened, that means her faith wasn't strong enough, or perhaps she never truly believed in the first place."

Is everyone in the Church like this? Are these the kinds of idiots Asia had to deal with? Unbelievable!

"What are you to Asia?" Xenovia pressed.

"Her family," I responded boldly. "Her friend. Her companion. That's why I'll help her. I'll protect her! So if you try to lay a hand on her, that means you'll be *my* enemy! I'll take you all down if I have to!"

Xenovia's eyes narrowed at my confrontational attitude. "Is that a challenge to us—to all those of the Church? You have a loud bark for one measly demon. Perhaps you haven't trained your servants well enough, Gremory?"

"Issei, don't—" the prez began, trying to calm me down. That's when Kiba intervened.

"Fine. I'll take you on."

Kiba had drawn one of his swords. His whole body emanated a savage, murderous aura.

"And who are you supposed to be?" Xenovia asked.

Kiba flashed her a dauntless smirk. "I'm your senior. But apparently, *I* was a failure."

At that moment, countless Demon Swords burst into existence throughout the room.

—○●○—

I couldn’t for the life of me fathom how we had gotten to this point.

I was standing in the clearing behind the old school building that we’d used when practicing for the Ball Tournament.

Kiba was next to me. Across from us stood Irina and Xenovia. It was like a standoff from a movie.

A crimson magic barrier had been raised around the four of us.

The other club members were watching from outside the barrier.

“Should we get started, then?”

Irina and Xenovia had taken off their white robes, revealing that their bodies were fully clothed in black combat gear. They weren’t showing any skin, but the armor was still erotic in its own way. It highlighted their proportions and looked almost like the kind of thing you’d find in bondage role play…

By the way, they both had nice curves and wonderfully tight hips!

What’s more, Xenovia had removed the cloth that she had used to sheath her Excalibur.

Irina’s shape-changing Excalibur had taken on the form of a Japanese katana.

I suppose I should explain how we wound up like this.

After I’d started arguing with the two Holy Sword wielders, Kiba had decided to butt in—essentially throwing a match into a tinderbox.

Given that it was her own servants who’d initiated the fight, not even the prez could bring the situation under control. That was when Xenovia had come out with a proposal.

“Testing the strength of Rias Gremory’s Familia could be

fun… I'm interested in the powers of my *senior*, too."

Xenovia had accepted Kiba's challenge.

As this was a private duel, she had guaranteed us that she wouldn't report anything that came of it to the Church. She and Irina seemed to have at least a basic understanding of our situation and so decided that there wouldn't be a problem as long as we didn't end up killing each other.

The training area behind the old school building had been chosen as the location. To prevent unnecessary destruction and shield the duel from prying eyes, Akeno had established a barrier around the area. With it in place, we could afford to cut loose a little.

Kiba had been the one to draw first, but for some reason, I was going to fight, too.

…Why? I wondered. I hadn't been trying to start a fight when I stood up for Asia.

Sure, I was upset about those things that Xenovia had said, but I'd never intended to get caught up in a duel like this.

I'd meant to drop the matter back when the prez had indicated to me to stop, but then…

Well, Kiba had ended up adding fuel to the fire, and this was the outcome.

"Issei, this may just be a match, but be careful of their Holy Swords!" the prez called out.

"R-right!" I replied, my heart ringing out with gratitude for her consideration.

I was trying to act cool, but I was trembling in trepidation. Before we'd come outside, I'd been made to watch a video called *The Holy Sword Terror Special Collection*.

It was a collection of recordings of battles between Holy Sword users and high-class demons. Whenever one of those high-class demons sustained a wound from a Holy Sword, smoke rose up from the injury. Then the dismembered parts

of their body just completely vanished. They were literally gone—annihilated.

Holy Swords had the power to destroy demons outright. Not even corpses were left behind.

Those weapons were seriously terrifying. I didn't want to get disintegrated!

Kiba had already activated his Sacred Gear and summoned up a whole bunch of Demon Swords around him.

"…Are you laughing?" Xenovia asked dubiously.

Kiba wore an uncanny smile on his lips.

It was a faint, cold smile. There wasn't a single trace of his usual refreshing character about him.

…Does he really hate Holy Swords that much…?

"Indeed. The one thing I've longed to destroy has appeared willingly before my very eyes. Heh. I'd heard that hanging around demons and dragons was a surefire way to meet the high and mighty, but who would've imagined that it'd happen so soon?"

Ddraig had said something similar. Supposedly, all sorts of individuals found themselves drawn to those who possessed the power of a dragon.

Had I—or Ddraig, technically—caused this? I didn't want to believe it.

"…Sword Birth? A Sacred Gear that allows its user to create any Demon Sword that its user can visualize in their mind. A most unique and rare artifact… During the Holy Sword Project, there was one subject facing disposal who managed to escape. That was you, I take it?"

Kiba didn't respond to Xenovia's question. He merely readied himself. The murderous resolve in his eyes was palpable.

Hey, Kiba? Come on—killing is off the table, right? It's just a match. If you go overboard, things could get ugly between demons and the followers of God, you know? You'll make trouble for Demon King Sirzechs, too.

"Issei Hyoudou."

Irina Shidou, the girl with the chestnut hair, was standing across from me. I had always thought she was a boy back when we were kids, but no matter how you looked at her, she was clearly a woman now. I had only faint memories of my time with her, though.

She was a real beauty and had a nice body. I couldn't deny that she was my type.

"It was quite shocking to discover that my old friend has become a demon…" She looked terribly disappointed.

I hadn't expected to become a demon, either, but I was still living life to the fullest.

"Er, Irina Shidou… Is Irina all right? Do we have to fight? I've already gotten what I wanted to say off my chest. I kind of feel like this isn't really necessary."

I'd been wanting to voice what I thought about the Church for a while. In a way, Irina and Xenovia had helped lift a burden off my shoulders.

Then again, I wasn't going to hesitate if they kept bad-mouthing Asia.

I wouldn't let anyone insult a member of my family.

Irina, however, gave me a pitying look. A solitary tear ran down her cheek.

"Poor Issei Hyoudou. No, I'll call you Issei for old times' sake. I feel like fate is making fun of me right now! I had an affinity with Holy Swords, so I traveled to England to answer my calling and to be of service to the Lord! This must be another of His trials! I've returned home after so long, only to find that my dearest friend has become a demon! What a cruel twist of the knife! The passage of time certainly can be unforgiving. But if I can overcome this traumatic heartbreak, my faith will bring me that much closer to Him! Step forth, Issei! With this Excalibur, I will judge your sins! Amen!"

Droplets had formed in the corners of Irina's eyes, but she pointed the tip of her Holy Sword my way with an overzealous force of will.

Huh? Huuuuuh?! Wh-what on earth is she saying?! Whoa! Her eyes are positively sparkling!

It almost looked like she was drunk on faith. Was she actually enjoying this turn of events?

Whatever the case, she clearly wasn't the kind of girl it was wise to get involved with!

"I don't understand it, but Boosted Gear, Activate!"

"Boost!"

A red flash of light burst out from the gauntlet on my left arm. At the same time, a powerful voice boomed.

My Sacred Gear could double its wielder's strength every ten seconds. I could also channel that accumulated power into another person or object.

Unfortunately, I needed time to charge it. I wouldn't be able to meet Irina's attack otherwise.

Seeing me activate my Sacred Gear, both Irina and Xenovia looked legitimately surprised.

"…A Longinus."

"Is that the Gauntlet of the Red Dragon Emperor? The Boosted Gear? What is that doing in this Far Eastern country…?"

Irina and Xenovia frowned in consternation.

"You're going to get hurt if you let Issei distract you!"

Clang!

Kiba lashed out at Xenovia. The collision of his Demon Sword and her Holy Sword produced a shower of sparks.

Xenovia broke out into a dauntless grin as she met his attack head-on. "Sword Birth, the Boosted Gear, and Asia Argento's Twilight Healing. Three heretical Sacred Gears. Perhaps it was inevitable that you would all become demons."

"My strength is born from the will of my fallen comrades, those murdered in ignominy! I will use it to strike down anyone who wields an Excalibur and crush that accursed, broken weapon into oblivion!"

Did Kiba vow to avenge the other test subjects killed

during the Holy Sword Project?

"I'm coming for you, Issei!"

Whoosh!

Irina launched with her blade.

That was close! She's seriously trying to cut me down! If that thing hit me, it would do major damage to my demon body, right? A direct hit would be beyond bad!

"Not yet!"

As I evaded her oncoming strikes, I felt the strength in my gauntlet rising up again.

"Boost!"

Energy poured through my body, doubling my power yet again! It still wasn't enough to allow me to hold my own, though!

How much power am I gonna need? Dammit! Not only did I have minimal combat experience, but this was my first time ever fighting against a Holy Sword! I had no idea what to expect!

All I could do was keep trying to evade Irina's attacks while charging my energy until I could go on the offensive!

With things as they were, there was little choice but to use my special technique. If I didn't, I wouldn't be able to stand my ground! Heck, I was sure to lose if I didn't!

As soon as the opportunity presented itself, I was going to use my Dress Break attack!

Dress Break was one of my ultimate moves. I used my boosted demon powers to strip away the clothes that garbed a woman's body.

Heh, I'm going to blast away Irina's combat outfit!

"…What a lecherous face. I wonder what you're thinking about?" Irina asked, dubious.

Heh. Irina, I'm going to worship every inch of your naked body!

"…Please be careful. Issei has the power to blast away the clothes of any woman he touches."

Koneko?! Why are you telling my enemy about the ace

up my sleeve?!

I glanced Koneko's way, entreating her to say no more. Undaunted, she added, "…You're the worst. The enemy of all women."

"Ugh! That's harsh, Koneko!"

"What a base technique! Issei! Not only has your soul fallen to demonhood, but your heart has also been stained by evil! Dear God, I pray that in Your divine wisdom, you never forgive this sinful pervert!" Irina clasped her hands together in prayer, her expression filled with sorrow.

"Don't look at me like that!"

"…You're disgusting."

I'm sorry, Koneko. I'm really sorry for being a pervert!

"Issei! If you wanted a woman's body so badly, you should have told me…! I would happily offer myself to you!" Asia openly declared.

What a dedicated sense of self-sacrifice! Asia truly had the heart of a former Christian! It was still a pretty audacious thing to suddenly blurt out, though.

"I see. So you're a creature of carnal lust. To me, that seems a very demonic way of thinking," Xenovia said with a sigh.

Her words sounded calm, but her eyes were filled with contempt!

"I'm sorry," Kiba apologized.

What are you saying that for, Kiba?! Don't act like I'm the only evil creature here!

He created another Demon Sword and gripped it in his free hand. Adopting a dual-sword stance, he faced down Xenovia.

"Pull yourself together! I'm going to burn you to ash! And freeze you where you stand! Fire Brand! Freeze Mist!"

Flames began to whirl around the first of Kiba's Demon Swords, while silver frost and a mass of cold air shimmered around the second.

Kiba was a Knight, and a Knight's core attribute was

speed. He charged at Xenovia with a rapid barrage of strikes.

Surprisingly, Xenovia somehow managed to dodge those oncoming attacks bearing down from every possible direction with the bare minimum of movement.

“The agility of a Knight and both fire and ice swords? Not bad, but you shouldn’t underestimate me!”

Ching!

With a single swing of Xenovia’s blade, both of Kiba’s Demon Swords shattered into fine particles of light.

“—!”

Kiba was left speechless.

What destructive power! So this is what a Holy Sword is capable of?!

“My blade is the embodiment of destruction. There is nothing that can withstand its touch.”

Xenovia then swung her sword around and thrust it point down into the ground.

Groooooaaaaarrrrr!

The earth shook violently beneath my feet—a deafening echo coursed through the field.

I lost my footing and fell flat to my knees. The tremors were so bad that I couldn’t get back up.

Dust billowed around me, and clumps of dirt flew right in my face.

“Bleurgh!” I spat out the dirt that’d managed to get into my mouth, then lifted a hand to shield my eyes from the dust.

—!

When I looked up, I could hardly believe my eyes.

A crater?!

Xenovia’s Holy Sword had couched a huge, gaping hole in the ground!

She did that with just one hit?! A single swing of her blade?!

It hadn’t even looked as if she’d put any particular effort

into the attack!

“This is the power of my Excalibur. It’s capable of devastating any rabble that gets in its way. It isn’t called Excalibur Destruction for nothing.”

Excalibur Destruction!

That thing was on a whole different level! Not even Kiba’s Demon Swords could meet it head-on without being shattered!

Kiba looked over the ruin that Xenovia’s weapon had wrought. His expression was one of bitter frustration.

“…And that’s only one-seventh of the true Excalibur… I guess there’s going to be a lot of carnage if I’m going to obliterate all of them.”

The shadow of raw hatred hadn’t left Kiba’s eyes.

Is he seriously hoping to destroy all seven of the Excaliburs?! Look what just one of them was capable of! Even for Kiba, a quest like that seemed insurmountable.

I was starting to get sick of brushing up against all these people who were so much more powerful than we were!

“Boost!”

That was my third charge.

“Argh! Xenovia! Why couldn’t you give me some warning before breaking the ground like that?! I’ve got dirt all over me now!” Irina spat out as she brushed the dust from her clothes.

The chestnut-haired girl turned back to me, brandishing her sword. “Now then, let’s finish this!” Having made her declaration, she dashed my way!

Irina was fast! She closed the distance between us in a flash! She might not have been as swift on her feet as Kiba, but she was undoubtedly speedier than I was!

What should I do? Should I pause my Sacred Gear’s charging cycle and go on the offensive? Even if Irina didn’t mean to kill me, I would quickly burn up my stamina if all I did was keep dodging her attacks!

Thankfully, I had at least accumulated enough energy to

cope with my opponent's moves. I definitely still lacked enough to take her down, though!

There was no way Irina was going to give me the time to reactivate my Sacred Gear if I paused it.

My only hope was to evade her Excalibur while aiming for her body. No matter how powerful that weapon of hers was, Irina herself was still just a normal human.

Technically, I didn't know that for sure, but I had to bet on it being true.

"You're good!" Irina exclaimed. "You know how to dodge! Your master has trained you well!"

"You could say that! She can be a strict teacher! It's thanks to her that I can keep up with opponents beyond my level!"

"Boost!"

"Let's do this, Boosted Gear!"

"Explosion!"

I halted the charging process there, readying myself to fight with the power I had accumulated!

If I didn't stop it, everything I had gained up to now could get released, and I would have to start again from zero.

Boom!

Raw energy coursed through my flesh. I had doubled my strength four times over, and I was confident that it was enough to take on Irina.

The plan was to pour my energy into blasting off her clothes. Ah, I really was the worst!

I hadn't gone through all that grueling training or faced off against Riser Phenex and his Familia to lose now.

I swore to strip Irina naked! That was the only way!

I charged straight for her, focusing my energy to blow that armor right off her.

"Sorry about this!"

"Argh! Gross!"

Irina twisted her body to dodge my sudden tackle as if fleeing from a groper. *Tch!* She was fast! I wasn't about to

give up, though! I didn't care if this made me a pervert—I had a vigorous, robust appetite!

"No you don't!"

I was so preoccupied with stripping off her clothes that I found myself adapting to match her movements.

Right! No, left! In the back of my mind, I could see where she was about to flee before she even moved there!

"It looks like Issei's movements are becoming faster and more flexible," I heard Akeno remark.

"…So his perversion can boost his physical stats this much…," Koneko murmured.

By the sound of it, they were both impressed by my lecherous power.

Sorry for being such a creep! I thought. Now that I had set my mind on stripping this girl naked, nothing could stop me!

Finally, I caught up to my opponent.

"What?! How did you match my movements?" Irina cried.

Heh-heh, never underestimate the power of a twisted mind! I've got you now! I'm going to strip you down, Irina Shidou! Your breasts will be mine to worship!

My fingers wriggled in anticipation, and my mouth twisted in a lecherous grin as I inched closer before going straight at her!

And yet—

Before I could reach her, she ducked down.

…Wh-what…?

Unable to halt my momentum, I continued straight past her, right through Akeno's barrier, and into Asia and Koneko—

And yes, I touched them.

My fingers brushed up against both of their shoulders. At that instant—

Rip!

—their uniforms came flying right off. Yes, not even their underwear was spared. They were both stark naked.

My Dress Break technique had been a success.

Asia's still-maturing breasts and Koneko's petite ones bounced gloriously before me.

Bah! Blood gushed from my nose.

Thank you! No, wait! Th-this wasn't what I wanted!

"Kyagh!"

Asia bent forward, concealing her body out of embarrassment. *Sorry, Asia, but you've got some magnificent proportions! I'm looking forward to seeing them grow even bigger!*

As for Koneko… She was expressionless, but there was an unmistakable murderous aura emanating from her. A trembling fist rose into the air.

Th-this isn't looking good…

"K-Koneko! D-don't get the wrong idea! That was a mistake! W-well, I mean, it worked, but still! Think of it this way—there's a demand for petite breasts like yours! R-right?! No, what am I saying?! You only got hit because Irina Shidou dodged…! I wasn't aiming for you or Asia! B-but still, thank you! I—I guess I should thank you for—"

"…Sick freak!"

Slam!

"Gaaaaarrrrrgggggghhhhh!"

A heavy blow slammed into my gut as a weightless sensation swept over my body. Suddenly, I was flying through the air!

I hit the ground hard, rolling several times across the dirt before coming to a stop.

…

Gah. Sh-she sure did some serious damage… It hurt so much that I wanted to stay down.

Poke.

Irina prodded my head softly with her index finger.

"Issei, are you still breathing? I think you just received divine punishment. Perhaps you should seal away that obscene attack. Sound good?"

“…N-no… I put all my demonic talents into developing that technique… I’m going to keep stripping girls naked… You don’t know how long I wrestled with the decision of working to develop this ability or one that lets me see through girls’ clothes…”

I forced myself to my feet, sluggishly confronting Irina once again. “I’m going to keep fighting until I’m strong enough to blow girls’ clothes off just by looking at them!”

I was fired up now! I rushed straight for Irina.

“I can’t believe you’re able to fight this hard on lust alone!”

“Irina Shidou! Sex is power! Sex is justice!”

“Lord, give me the strength to resist this perverted demon! Amen!” Irina adjusted her stance with her Holy Sword, then charged my way.

I shifted my footing and tried to kick her legs out from under her as she lunged toward me with a slash.

Realizing what I was trying to do, Irina leaped lightly into the air.

I dug my feet into the ground, then shot myself up after her as I unleashed an inside uppercut!

Whoosh!

That blow, however, missed her chin and passed cleanly through thin air.

Tch! I missed!

Irina’s eyes twitched. She lashed out with a sideways swing of her sword, but I stepped backward to avoid it, leaving her to watch on in surprise.

“…I’m sorry. I may have underestimated you a little. You move well,” she complimented with a stern expression.

Whoa, hold on! Maybe I have a chance? No sooner had I thought that then my balance crumbled, and I fell to the ground.

…What’s going on…? A feeling of absolute debilitation swept through my body.

I had always been able to endure a certain amount of

injury in the past, but this was different. This time, I had no strength left…

…Dammit… What's going on…?

I glanced down at my stomach, only to see a small plume of smoke billowing into the air! *Did she hit me with her Holy Sword?! When?!*

She must have grazed me during my last attack. Even a minor scrape had all but done me in…

"This is what a blow from a Holy Sword can bring. Even the smallest of strikes will sap the strength of demons and fallen angels alike. And that was only an extremely shallow wound. If I had struck a little deeper, it might have been lethal."

This is an extremely shallow wound?! That's all that's needed to bring me to my knees?!

"Reset!"

My Boosted Gear had run out of time. Even the charged energy I had accumulated inside me evaporated.

I was back to normal Issei.

"If you'd managed one more power-up, you would probably have been able to avoid my last attack. You could've been an excellent opponent, but you tried to use your Sacred Gear without properly understanding the difference in our power. That's why you lost. A mistake like that can be fatal on the battlefield."

…Dammit, I cursed. It was no good. I couldn't move at all… Had I lost?

I'd gone and humiliated myself in front of Rias and Asia. I really was pathetic!

"Aughhhhh!"

Kiba let out a mighty roar as a new shape began to form in his hand, stretching into the length of a sword…

"Let's see which blade is the most destructive! Will it be your Holy Sword or my Demon Sword?!"

A huge, two-handed weapon appeared in his hands. Believe me when I say, Kiba looked downright scary.

Just how big was that sword? It was taller than Kiba was. It had to be over two meters long.

Kiba began to swing that blade with ferocious force. Before the weapon could connect, however, Xenovia let out a disappointed sigh.

“Too bad. That was a poor decision.”

Screeeeeeeeeech!

A violent metallic noise filled the air, and Kiba’s weapon was sent flying.

Its blade had been severed from its hilt.

Xenovia’s Excalibur had shorn clean through Kiba’s Demon Sword.

“Your strength lies in your agility and the wide variety of weapons that you have at your disposal. But you don’t have the strength to wield such an ungainly blade, and trying to do so hobbles your movements. You want destructive power, but that isn’t where your skills lie. I’d hoped you were capable of realizing that much.”

Slam!

Xenovia brought the hilt of her Holy Sword down hard into Kiba’s abdomen.

It didn’t look like there was a lot of strength behind the hit, but it sent a shock wave coursing throughout the battlefield. Even a blunt-force strike from the pommel of that weapon had tremendous destructive potential from the look of it.

“Gah!”

Kiba fell to his knees, blood spurting from his mouth.

“I didn’t even have to strike you with the edge of my blade to incapacitate you.”

Xenovia took one final scornful look at Kiba before turning to leave.

“…W-wait!”

Kiba reached out as if to physically hold her back, but it was clear to everyone watching that he’d already lost.

Akeno released her barrier, dispelling the red aura that

surrounded the battlefield.

The battle was over.

“My dear *senior*, try to keep your wits about you next time you face me. Rias Gremory, remember what we talked about earlier. Also, you might want to train your servants a bit better. They seem little more than their base talents at the moment.”

Kiba was staring up at Xenovia with hatred in his eyes.

Xenovia’s gaze then shifted to me. “And let me tell *you* something. The Vanishing Dragon has already awakened.”

—.

Wh-what…?

“I’m sure you’ll meet sooner or later, but at this rate, you won’t stand a chance.” With that, Xenovia collected her belongings and made to leave.

“Ah, wait, Xenovia! Well, I guess that’s it for now, Issei. If you want me to judge your sins again, just let me know! Amen!” Irina made the sign of the cross with her hand and, with a parting wink, took off after her companion.

The prez closed her eyes. It wasn’t hard to guess what she was thinking.

Kiba and I had been completely crushed.

—○●○—

“Are you okay?”

Asia rested her hand on my stomach and healed my injuries with her Sacred Gear. She was wearing one of the spare uniforms kept in the old school building.

Right, I blew her old uniform clean off her…

That green aura flowed out from her hands, enveloping me in its warmth and restoring my body.

“I’ve made a fool of myself, Asia,” I said with a forced grin.

Asia, however, shook her head. “You were fighting a Holy

Sword. I'm just glad you weren't hurt worse than this. I was so scared that she'd kill you, you know?"

I'd made her worry over me again. All I ever did was make her fret.

"Sorry about your clothes," I apologized.

No matter how you looked at it, I was in the wrong there.

Asia flashed me a bright smile, though. "You were imagining something, weren't you, Issei? It's okay. You can do whatever you want with me."

Ugh, I could feel my eyes tearing up. *Asia, I had no idea you trusted me so deeply!*

Even so, I hadn't really been thinking about anything other than stripping girls' clothes away, but that grin of hers was too kind and dazzling.

"…If you'd charged your Sacred Gear to the next level, you might have won," Koneko said as she massaged my shoulders with all her strength. She, too, had changed into a spare uniform.

Ow. Seriously, Koneko, that hurts!

Despite her obvious anger, Koneko had never said anything like that to me before! I was moved!

"…You should've at least realized that much. But you don't have enough training or experience. And your mind is always in the gutter. Sick freak."

Augh! That really struck a nerve. It might be too late now, but sorry again for being such a pervert!

"Stop! Yuuto!" sounded Rias's voice from a short distance away.

I turned in her direction only to see Kiba, seemingly anxious to leave, and the prez trying to keep him back.

What was going on? Was he trying to go somewhere?

"I will *not* allow it! You are a Knight of the Gremory Familia! I won't let you become a stray! You're staying right here!"

"…I only managed to escape the Church because of my fallen comrades. It's my duty to see their resentment and

regret exacted with my Demon Swords…” With those words, Kiba left the scene.

“Yuuto… Why…?”

I couldn’t bear to look at Rias’s sorrowful face.

In that moment, I realized what I had to do.

—○●○—

“Ah. So? What did you call me here for?”

We had the next day off school. I had called Saji, the Pawn from the chairwoman’s Familia, to meet me outside the train station.

He looked listless. The prez had helped me get in contact with him.

“…Right. What are you both up to?” Koneko asked. She’d grabbed on to my shirt and was refusing to let go.

I had bumped into her entirely by chance on the way to the station to meet Saji. When I realized it was her, I’d tried to make my escape, but she had caught me without any difficulty at all.

I was still physically weaker than such a petite girl. I suppose there was no helping that.

The fact that I had tried to run away from her must have aroused her suspicions, because she refused to let me out of her sight afterward. She probably still resented my destroying her clothes the other day.

As for why I’d wanted to meet Saji out here—

I coughed to clear my throat before cutting to the chase. “I want Irina Shidou and Xenovia to give me permission to destroy the Holy Sword Excalibur.”

Saji’s and Koneko’s eyes opened wide in surprise at this declaration.

Life.3

The Plan to Destroy the Holy Sword!

“Nooooo! I’m going home!” Saji wailed as he tried to escape, but Koneko was holding firm to his arm, refusing to let him leave.

After I’d revealed my intention to destroy Excalibur, Koneko had remained silent for a moment, pondering what I had said. Before long, she declared, “I’ll help. This is about Yuuto, isn’t it?”

Right on, Koneko! I knew I could count on you!

Saji, on the other hand, had turned pale and tried to flee. That was when Koneko grabbed hold of him.

“Hyoudou! What does that have to do with me?! That’s for your Familia to sort out! I’m part of the Sitri Familia! It’s none of my business! Leave me out of it!” he begged, tears streaming down his cheeks.

“Don’t say that. You’re the only demon I know who I thought might be willing to help.”

“As if! There’s no way I’m helping you! She’ll kill me! The chairwoman will have my head!”

Whoa, I could see his fear of Sona writ large on his face. She must have been truly terrifying to have made him feel like that.

“I’m sure your Rias is both strict and reasonable! But you should know that the chairwoman is draconian and loves punishing us!”

Saji was right that the prez was firm yet fair. So the chairwoman was draconian, was she? That was good to

know.

With single-minded determination, I took off with Koneko and Saji to search throughout the town for Irina and Xenovia.

“Koneko, you know how Kiba was a victim of the Holy Sword Project and how he’s got a real grudge against Excalibur, right?” I asked.

Koneko nodded.

“When Irina and Xenovia called on us, they said the Church had decided it would prefer to destroy the Excaliburs forever rather than let the fallen angels get their hands on them. If all else failed, they said their goal was to make sure the weapons didn’t remain with the fallen angels. In other words, they have to either recover the Excaliburs or else eradicate them, right?”

“…That’s what they said.”

“So I thought we might try to help them, with Kiba taking the lead. They lost three of them, so they might not mind too much if we retrieve or destroy one.”

“…You want Yuuto to overcome one of the Excaliburs and clear his conscience?”

Koneko had figured it out. I flashed her a smile, nodding.

That way, Kiba could have his revenge, and everything would be okay. He could return to his usual, carefree life and get on with his demon work. That’s what I hoped anyway.

“Kiba needs to win against an Excalibur to exact his revenge. Xenovia and Irina want to make sure the fallen angels can’t have the Excaliburs, even if that means destroying them. We should be able to satisfy both goals. All we have to do is find them and talk them into it.”

“…It won’t be easy.”

“Yeah, I know.”

Koneko was right on that count. Even at the time, I knew our chances weren’t particularly high. On top of that—

“…We’ll have to keep it a secret from the president and

the others," Koneko reasoned.

Yep, she was right there, too. We couldn't afford to let either the prez or Akeno hear about this. Rias was sure to disapprove.

No doubt she'd say something like, *Even for Yuuto's sake, we can't put our necks out for the likes of angels or the Church*.

Rias was a high-class demon and particularly rigid when it came to things like that. She'd opposed me when I'd wanted to go and save Asia from the fallen angels, and this certainly would've been no different.

Speaking of, we couldn't tell Asia, either. She was even worse at keeping a secret than I was. She couldn't tell a lie with a straight face.

"…Trying to talk to them could lead to a fight, though. It could make things harder between them and us," I pointed out.

That meant I needed to be prepared to put my life on the line.

Whoa, I could end up dying.

"Koneko. If you want to leave, I won't stop you. And, Saji, if things heat up, you should get out of here, too."

"I want to get out of here now! I can't do this! The chairwoman will kill me if I help you destroy an Excalibur without her permission! She'll torture me to death!"

Hey, come on, now—there's no need to cry. Just stick around for now, and if the situation gets dangerous, then go, I thought.

"We might be able to talk it through with them. And if we can, then we're going to need your help."

"Whaaaaat?! You're only out to help yourself! I'm dead! I'm already dead!"

He might have been right about that. Unfortunately, there were no other male demons I could ask for help. Saji was my only hope.

"I won't run away. This is for my friend," Koneko stated

plainly. Her gaze was filled with determination.

Koneko could certainly be a passionate one, that was for sure. Back during our fight with Riser Phenex and his Familia, she'd been particularly fervent. She undoubtedly had a keen sense of camaraderie.

We searched around town for twenty minutes before we found Irina and Xenovia. They might have been on a secret mission, but two young women in white robes weren't exactly inconspicuous.

"Oh, blessings on the wandering sheep before us!"

"Please, Heavenly Father, show mercy on these poor, wretched souls!"

Like I said, they weren't hard to spot.

Two young, white-robed women were praying on the side of the street. It would've been stranger not to have spotted them.

It looked like they were in a bit of a pinch. Passersby were staring at them strangely.

"How can this be? Is this really Japan? I'd heard this country was highly advanced. This is why I can't stand countries that don't share our beliefs."

"Don't say that, Xenovia. We used up all our money. If we don't rely on the charity of heathens, we won't be able to eat. We can't even afford a loaf of bread!"

"Hmph. This is all because you had to go and buy that dodgy-looking painting from that swindler," Xenovia spat, pointing to a poorly drawn picture of what might have been a saint.

What's going on? Did some hawker convince them to buy something?

"What are you saying?!" Irina exclaimed. "It's clearly a holy figure! The person from the shop said as much!"

"Who is it, then? It doesn't remind *me* of anyone."

The figure in the image did look like a foreigner. He was dressed in shabby-looking clothing. What appeared to be a halo was floating above his head. A pair of baby angels

hovered in the background, holding small trumpets.

"…Saint Peter…maybe?"

"You've got to be kidding me. There's no way Saint Peter would look like that."

"Oh, how would I know?!"

"Ah, why did I wind up with you as a partner…? Lord, is this another of your trials?"

"Hey, don't talk about me like that! When your spirits drop, they drop hard, huh?"

"Shut up! This is why you Protestants are all heretics! You don't share the same values as us Catholics! Show some respect for the saints!"

"What?! That's rich! You Catholics are slaves to outmoded traditions!"

"What was that, you heretic?!"

"*You're* the heretic!"

In a matter of seconds, the two of them were butting heads…

Grrrrrrrrr…

The sound of their growling stomachs was so loud that I heard it even at a distance.

No sooner did that noise die down than the two of them flopped to the ground.

"…First, we need to find something to fill our stomachs. Otherwise, we won't even be able to think about taking back the Excaliburs."

"…Right. Should we threaten the pagans for money? I'm sure the Lord will forgive us if we only target pagans."

"What if we attacked a Buddhist temple? Or we could steal their offertory box? No, that's a bad idea. We could try to put on a street performance with our swords. That kind of international pastime should be fine no matter what country you're in."

"That's an excellent idea! Maybe if we slice the fruit with the Excaliburs, people might throw us some coins!"

"Well, the fruit is already gone. I guess we don't have any

other choice. We'll have to use the painting."

"No! You can't!"

With that, the two of them started arguing once again. Their bickering was giving me a headache, but I pushed through it and chose that moment to approach them.

Seriously, it was hard to believe that these were the same two people who had been so full of bluster in the clubroom only a day earlier.

—○●○—

"So delicious! Japanese food is awesome!"

"Yep, yep! It tastes like home!"

Xenovia and Irina were stuffing their faces with one dish after another from our table at a chain restaurant.

Whoa! They're really helping themselves here. Are these two really assassins dispatched by the Christian Church?

When Irina and Xenovia had spotted us during their argument in the street, they'd fixed us with ravenous looks.

"W-we're going to get some lunch. Do you want to come?" I'd suggested. It'd seemed decided even before I'd asked.

All throughout the walk to the restaurant, Irina and Xenovia had muttered things like, "We've sold our souls to demons," and, "This is only so we can carry out our mission."

I wasn't sure whether I could afford to treat them both, but thankfully, Koneko offered to chip in. It wounded my manly pride to have a girl younger than me help pay, however. After seeing how much Irina and Xenovia were eating, though, I realized it would have been impossible for me to cover the cost alone.

Th-this is all for the club. For the Familia, I reminded myself. *Damn you, Kiba!* Somehow I'd wound up risking my life for a freaking pretty boy! As compensation, I resolved to

make him introduce me to one of those mature ladies who summoned him for his services!

“Phew, that’s better. What is this world coming to when the faithful have to rely on the charity of demons?” Xenovia mused.

“Hey, come on. We’re treating you here.” My mouth twitched. There was more that I wanted to say, but I couldn’t. We would need to stay on positive terms if we were going to negotiate.

“Ah, thank you for the meal. Lord, show mercy on these gentle demons,” Irina said. With a hand, she signed the shape of a cross.

“Ugh!”

At that moment, I was struck by a splitting headache. Koneko and Saji raised their hands to their heads as well. Evidently, even a simple gesture like that could cause us harm.

“Ah, sorry. I wasn’t thinking,” Irina admitted with a cute smile.

At that moment, she and Xenovia looked like nothing more than two normal, beautiful young women.

Xenovia took a drink of water, then paused to catch her breath. “So what did you want with us?” she asked.

I hadn’t expected her to cut to the chase so quickly. Well, I guess it was pretty obvious that we hadn’t bumped into them both by chance.

“You’ve come to Japan to take back the Excaliburs, right?” I started.

“Yes. We explained the situation to you the other day.”

Perhaps because we’d just treated them to a meal, neither Xenovia nor Irina seemed to be particularly hostile toward us this time around.

From their point of view, fighting in a restaurant was not an option. They knew they could take us all down if it came to that anyhow.

“I want to help destroy the Excaliburs,” I admitted.

Both Irina and Xenovia flashed me a surprised look before exchanging glances with each other.

I swallowed hard and waited for their response.

Yikes! This is tense! I could be in serious trouble if they turn me down!

Things falling apart here risked the rise of a three-way conflict among demons, fallen angels, and the forces of God! That such a thing could arise over a few swords was a testament to how powerful those Excaliburs were. It was all I could do to hope that Irina and Xenovia weren't offended by the idea of joining forces with demons.

I'd broken out into a cold sweat by the time Xenovia responded. "I see. Perhaps we could leave one of them to you? If you really can destroy it, that is. Just make sure no one finds out what you are. We don't want our enemies—or our superiors—thinking that we've teamed up with you."

Against all expectations, the sterner of the two girls accepted my proposal.

My mouth was hanging open in astonishment.

She's okay with it? Seriously?

"Hold on, Xenovia. Are you sure? Issei *is* a demon, after all," Irina noted in objection.

That was the sort of response I'd been anticipating.

"Irina. To be honest with you, it isn't going to be easy retrieving all three swords and fighting Kokabiel entirely by ourselves."

"I realize that! But still!"

"At the very least, our mission is to destroy the three Excaliburs and escape. If there is any chance that our Excaliburs might be stolen, we are to destroy them immediately. Even using our secret weapon, there is only a thirty percent chance that we will be able to complete our mission and return home safely."

"But we understood the odds when we came to Japan. We were both prepared and ready."

"Indeed. Our superiors had no qualms about sending us

out here. We've essentially been told to sacrifice ourselves."

"Isn't that what we, the faithful of the Lord, are supposed to strive for above all else?"

"I've changed my mind about that. My beliefs are flexible. That's why I'm always able to find the best course of action."

"…You know, I've been thinking this for a while now, but there's something wrong with that faith of yours!"

"I won't deny it. But there's nothing strange about my belief that our duty is to carry out our mission *and* return home safely. We should strive to live so that we may continue to fight for the Lord in the future, no?"

"…I can't disagree with you there. But still…"

"That is precisely why I won't seek the help of any demon. Instead, I shall ask the dragon. Our superiors never said anything about that, did they?" Xenovia's gaze landed on me, the dragon.

More specifically, Xenovia had meant the being that dwelled in my left arm, the Red Dragon Emperor.

"I would never have imagined that we might meet the Red Dragon Emperor in this Far East island nation. He may have been turned into a demon, but I can sense that his power is alive and well. If the legends are true, you should be on par with the Demon King once fully boosted, right? Do that, and you shouldn't have any trouble destroying an Excalibur. Yes, us finding you here truly was the work of the Lord." Xenovia sounded quite pleased.

"Y-you're right that no one said anything about dragons, but… Augh, you're splitting hairs here! Your faith really is warped!" Irina groaned.

"I'm fine with that. Isn't he your childhood friend, Irina? For now, I think it's fine to trust him and the power of the dragon."

Irina fell silent, but it looked like she had grudgingly accepted Xenovia's suggestion.

That's it? All decided that quickly? Seriously?

Admittedly, I was still quite a way off from boosting to the level of a Demon King. I did think there was a good chance of surpassing an Excalibur if I channeled my power through Kiba, however. That seemed like our best option.

“Okay. Then it’s decided. I’ll lend you this dragon’s power. Since you’ve agreed to work with us, you won’t have any problem with me calling my partner, right?” I asked. Before Irina or Xenovia could answer, I pulled out my cell phone and dialed Kiba.

“…I get it,” Kiba said with a sigh as he sipped at his coffee.

I’d asked him to join us at the restaurant.

“I’m with the two Excalibur users right now. Think you can meet us?” I’d asked. Kiba had made his way over without the slightest hesitation.

“To tell you the truth, I’m disappointed that someone who can wield an Excalibur would approve of their destruction.”

“You’ve got quite the mouth. If you were a stray, I would cut you down here and now.”

Kiba and Xenovia glared at each other.

Hey, cut it out, you two! We’re supposed to be discussing strategy, not fighting!

“You’ve got a grudge against the Holy Sword Project, don’t you?” Irina deduced. “And against the Excaliburs, too. And the Church.”

Kiba’s eyes narrowed. “Obviously,” he responded in a frigid tone of voice.

“But, Kiba, that project advanced Holy Sword research by leaps and bounds. It’s thanks to it that there are compatible users like Xenovia and me.”

“Do you think that justifies murdering all the other failed test subjects?” Kiba leveled a seething gaze at Irina.

Disposing of all of Kiba’s peers had indeed been an act of immeasurable cruelty. The way I saw it, that kind of

inhumanity was completely at odds with everything the Church claimed to represent.

Irina, too, looked troubled by Kiba's response.

It was Xenovia who broke the silence. "We also view that whole affair with great repugnance. The beliefs of the individual responsible for that project were completely at odds with Church doctrine. He was charged with heresy and now serves the fallen angels."

"The fallen angels? Tell me his name," Kiba demanded, his interest piqued.

"Valper Galilei. These days, people refer to him as the Massacring Archbishop."

Valper. So that was the name of Kiba's sworn enemy.

"…So I'll find him if I hunt down fallen angels…"

There was a new determination in Kiba's eyes. Now that he had a way of locating his target, it looked like he was ready to take the next step.

"I guess I should give you some advice, too. The other day, I was attacked by someone wielding an Excalibur. He'd just killed a priest. The victim must have been one of your people."

"—!"

Every single one of us tensed at this revelation. I mean, of course we did! None of us could've expected that Kiba had already encountered the one responsible for all of this. It begged the question of why Kiba hadn't volunteered this information sooner. That must have been what he was so preoccupied with lately.

"The assailant was Freed Sellzen. Does the name ring a bell?"

Freed! That psycho priest! No way could I have forgotten about him! He was that white-haired lunatic we'd run into a while back! If Kiba's story was to be believed, that nutjob was still in town.

Xenovia and Irina both frowned at that name, too.

"I see. So it was him," Irina muttered.

“Freed Sellzen is a former Vatican exorcist who served directly under the pope. He was hailed as a prodigy and ascended to a full-fledged exorcist at the early age of thirteen. He’s well-known for having destroyed countless demons and legendary beasts,” Xenovia explained.

Irina then took over, continuing with, “But he took things too far. He didn’t hesitate to kill his allies, too. Freed never truly shared the faith. The only thing that ever mattered to him was savagely butchering whatever monster he encountered. That and his unhealthy obsession with fighting. It was only a matter of time until he was branded a heretic.”

So the Church had problems with him, too? I could understand how they must have felt.

“I see. Freed used one of the stolen Excaliburs to murder our people. I didn’t think that we would be the ones to pay for the disposal team’s failure to eliminate him.” Xenovia was clearly frustrated by this development.

Looks like you’ve made a lot of enemies, Freed, but I guess you know that already.

“Let’s not get distracted. We should focus on how we’re going to work together to destroy the Excaliburs.” With that, Xenovia pulled out a pen and a notepad. She quickly jotted down her contact information. “Call me if you need anything.”

“Thanks,” I said as I took the piece of paper. “In that case, I’ll give you ours, too—”

“Your mom already gave us your number,” Irina said with a grin.

“Seriously?! Mom?! Without even asking me?!”

How could she have done that?! I bet she’d surrendered my info as soon as an old childhood friend stopped by. It was none of her business!

“I suppose we’ll be off, then. We’ll pay you back for the meal someday, Mr. Red Dragon Emperor.” Having decided that the conversation was over, Xenovia rose to her feet.

“Thanks for the food, Issei! Treat me again sometime, okay? Even if you are a demon, I’m sure the Lord won’t mind you offering a meal to a member of the Church!” Irina said in thanks, giving me a wink.

Is her faith really so flexible?

We watched the two of them leave before catching our collective breath.

Phew.

Somehow, things had come together. Despite the plan seeming like a total long shot, Xenovia and Irina proved willing to go along with it. That only meant the real danger was yet to come, however. A chill ran down my spine as I imagined what an Excalibur might do to us if we were to fail.

An operation with the tenuous peace between demons and angels hanging in the balance… Yep, this was a bold strategy, even for me.

“…Issei. Why are you doing this?” Kiba asked quietly.

He was undoubtedly wondering why I wanted to help him settle his personal grudge.

“We’re friends, aren’t we? We’re all part of the same Familia. Besides, you’ve helped me out before. Don’t take that to mean I’m trying to settle a debt; I just wanted to help you.”

“It’ll cause problems for the president if I was to slip up. Did that factor into your decision?” Kiba pressed.

“Of course. You’ll upset the prez if you go on a rampage. Although I guess the fact that I’ve decided on this plan by myself might be a bit of an issue, too. Still, it’s better than you becoming a stray, right? Regardless, we’ve come to an agreement with Xenovia and Irina, so it worked out all right in the end.”

Kiba still didn’t look entirely satisfied. He could be difficult to deal with at times.

At that moment, Koneko broke in, practically whispering, “…Yuuto. I would be lonely…if you disappeared.” Her face

looked surprisingly forlorn. Given how expressionless she usually was, this sudden change was quite a shock to the three guys sitting with her.

"…I'll help you… So please don't go."

—.

Koneko's plea was… Damn. She might've been talking to Kiba, but my heart skipped a beat nonetheless. I would never be able to betray this Familia! If a junior, and a girl at that, was to say to me what Koneko had, there was no way I would be able to resist her!

Kiba let out a perplexed chuckle. "I'm in quite the bind now. If that's how you feel, Koneko, I guess I can't go off on my own and do anything rash. All right. I'll go along with your plan. It's thanks to Issei that we all know who the real enemy is anyway. If we're going to do this, we *will* destroy an Excalibur."

Yeah! Kiba was on board and ready to roll!

Koneko broke into a small smile of relief.

Whoa! That's seriously cute! I didn't have a thing for petite girls, but that sure was something!

"Okay then, Excalibur Demolition Squad, our goal is clear! Let's find that stolen Excalibur and bust that psycho Freed's ass!"

I was pumped! So long as I had Kiba and Koneko by my side, I trusted we'd see this through somehow! *No*, I told myself. *We're definitely going to get this done! Excalibur! Freed! We're coming for you!*

There was one among our newly assembled task force who remained hesitant, though.

"…Er, me too?" Saji asked, raising his hand into the air. "I mean, I'm completely in the dark here… Did something happen between Kiba and Excalibur?"

Oh yeah. He didn’t know about Kiba’s history with the Holy Sword.

From where he was sitting, our previous conversation had probably been so fragmented as to be incomprehensible.

“…Let’s have a chat,” Kiba began. From there, he proceeded to fill in Saji between sips of his coffee.

Years ago, the Catholic Church had established the Holy Sword Project behind closed doors—an experiment conducted in a certain secret facility to produce individuals capable of wielding a Holy Sword.

The test subjects had all been young children—boys and girls—with various sword-related skills and Sacred Gears.

Day after day, they were subjected to cruel and inhumane experiments.

Their freedom usurped from them; they were repeatedly used as guinea pigs, with complete disregard for their lives and humanity.

Those poor kids weren’t without a dream of their own, however. They wanted to live. They had been raised to believe that God loved them, and they waited patiently for that certain special day.

Each believed they could become something greater than they were—that they could come to wield a Holy Sword.

Every day of every year, they were subjected to one cruel experiment after another. Their only comforts were the hymns they sang in their brief moments of rest. Unfortunately, only disposal awaited them in the end.

Not a single person among Kiba and his companions had been compatible with the Holy Swords.

“…Everyone died—killed by those who served God. No one saved them. All because they weren’t good fits for a Holy Sword. The Church locked us in there with an ‘amen’ and gassed us alive. We were vomiting blood, struggling on the floor, begging God to save us.”

Saji, Koneko, and I listened to Kiba's story in silence.

Kiba had managed to escape from the research facility, but the poison had already eaten away at his body.

Excepting those select few individuals, all the test subjects the Church had decided were unfit had been tossed away.

On the verge of death after making good on his escape, Kiba encountered Rias, who had been on a tour of Italy. The rest was easy enough to figure out.

"I want to avenge my comrades' deaths. No, I need to make sure they didn't die in vain. I live to prove that I'm stronger than any Excalibur."

…Kiba's childhood had been truly horrible.

Asia had lived a life of hardship, too, but Kiba's origin went above and beyond anything I could have imagined…

To be honest, I couldn't even comprehend the depths of his suffering.

Living only for revenge hardly sounded easy. The prez had said she had made him a demon because she wanted him to use his talents for something other than defeating a Holy Sword.

Sniffle.

A sudden sob broke the silence that followed Kiba's recounting of his childhood.

It was Saji.

He was crying. He was sobbing so hard that tears were washing down his face, and his nose was running.

He took Kiba's hand in his own and said: "Kiba! That must have been awful! Dreadful! Dammit! There are no gods or Buddhas in this world! You don't know how much I feel for you right now! Ah, it's a heartrending story! I see now why you hate the leaders of that institution and the Excaliburs! I understand!"

Whoa, I thought. Saji was nodding forcefully as he continued.

"To be honest, I didn't like you at first because you're a

pretty boy, but that's an entirely separate matter! I'll help you! I'll take whatever punishment the chairwoman has in store for me! We're going to destroy that Excalibur! I'll do everything I can, so you should, too! You can't betray Rias after she saved you from all that!"

Saji wasn't saying anything new, but I could feel his passion. I guess he had a good heart after all. I suppose he never really looked like a bad guy. There was some part of me that felt bad for having dragged him into this against his will, but I was glad that it'd worked out for the best.

"All right! This is as good a time as any! Now, I want you to listen to *my* story! You need to know who I am if we're going to work together!" Saji paused there for a second in apparent embarrassment before his eyes let out a sparkling glint. "My goal…is to get Chairwoman Sona pregnant and marry her! I know what you're thinking—that's an incredibly high hurdle for an unpopular guy like me, right? I mean, I haven't had a chance to have sex with anyone, let alone her… But I'm going to do it one day; I'm going to put a baby in her and marry her…"

Hearing Saji's confession, I felt something welling up inside me. Before I knew it, I was crying.

How could I not have? It was only natural.

Saji was just like me! We were practically cut from the same cloth!

We were brothers-in-arms.

I was so moved that I almost broke down into audible sobs, but I covered my mouth with my hand, trying to keep my emotions at bay.

Without saying anything, I took Saji's hands in my own and declared, "Saji! Hear me out! My goal is to fondle the prez's breasts—and suck on them!"

"…"

After a momentary pause, Saji began to join me in weeping.

"Hyoudou! You understand, don't you? You know how

hard it will be! Touching the breasts of a high-class demon… Your own master's, no less!"

"It's possible, Saji. We can do it. Nothing is out of reach, not even the breasts of our high-class demon masters! In fact, I've already touched them with this very hand!" I shook the one in question.

Saji stared at my hand, wholly enraptured. "You're kidding me! It's really possible?! You aren't lying, are you?!"

"It's the truth. Our masters' breasts are distant, but they're not unreachable!"

"Suck them…?! C-can I really suck the chairwoman's breasts…? I—I guess it's the nipples, right? That's the part to suckle, right?"

"Don't be stupid! Where else *but* the nipple would you go?! Yes! My mouth is going to go on the prez's nipples!"

"—!"

Saji broke down at my declaration.

"Saji! By ourselves, we may just be Pawns, but together, we're something more! Arm in arm, we will succeed! This battle is ours! If we work together, we might even impregnate our masters and marry them! Let's do everything we can to sleep with them!"

"Yes. Yes!"

There was nothing that two men in love with their masters' breasts couldn't accomplish!

Clasping each other's hands, Saji and I nodded to each other, affirming our resolve.

We were comrades. War buddies. Our newfound relationship couldn't be described with mere words.

At that moment, Saji and I communicated something through our very souls, our hearts and minds reverberating in kind.

"…Ah-ha-ha."

"…Disgusting."

Kiba and Koneko both let out resigned sighs.

When I glanced around, I realized that everyone in the

restaurant was eyeing Saji and me. I didn't care, though. Not in the slightest.

With that, the Excalibur Demolition Squad was born.

—○●○—

Several days after teaming up to help Kiba, I found myself letting out a long exhale from my seat in the clubroom.

Kiba, Koneko, Saji, and I had spent the past few evenings searching throughout the town for one of the missing Excaliburs. Our target was that psycho priest Freed, who was working under the fallen angels.

It sounded like he was out hunting priests, so we all dressed up as members of the clergy and strolled around town trying to lure him out. The tactic proved fruitless, however. That said, I wasn't exactly looking forward to seeing that wacko again.

Xenovia and Irina had lent us several sets of priestly clothing. The apparel dampened our demon powers somewhat, but we were unable to find our target despite our efforts.

Just where is that damn psycho priest lurking? I wanted to get this over with and let Kiba destroy that Excalibur once and for all…

Sooner or later, the prez was bound to realize what we were up to. No doubt we'd all be in trouble once that happened. It was possible she was already growing suspicious.

I'm sorry, Prez. I know I'm going behind your back. I'll apologize later. I'll make it up to you. So please, just overlook things this one time.

In my heart, I entreated her to show mercy when—

"You look like you've been stressing out a bit lately, Issei," Motohama said to me as he adjusted his glasses.

"Huh? Ah, I guess so. Even a guy like me isn't completely

free from worry," I replied.

"Is it about *that*? Maybe he's debating whether he should fondle Rias's breasts or Akeno's?" Matsuda joked.

"I ask myself that every day, Matsuda. Just so you know, the prez's are firmer. She's the winner when it comes to fullness, too. Akeno's are so wonderfully soft, though… No, the prez's are definitely meatier, but Akeno has an excellent balance between breast and areola. She's exquisite—a classic Japanese beauty! Regarding fondling, the prez's are the perfect volume to have fun, but Akeno's are so wonderfully big, too."

"If you keep going on like that, someone will come after you one of these days. They both have a lot of admirers throughout the school."

"Motohama… Breasts are more valuable than life."

"—. That's deep. Issei, you're an inspiration."

Pinch.

All of a sudden, someone tugged at my cheek. It was Asia.

Her eyes were glistening, and her cheeks were all puffed up. She was in a seriously bad mood.

"Asia," I managed, unable to properly form the necessary words. "What's wrong…?"

"…"

She continued to pull firmly at my cheek without saying anything. She wasn't putting a lot of force into it, but it seemed obvious she'd heard everything I'd just said…

"Curse you, Issei, you sex fiend! You've ravaged the Occult Research Club, and now you've got Asia fawning over you! Aughhhhh!" Matsuda let out an anguished cry as he held his head in his hands.

"…I know what you're up to, Issei. You've been walking home arm in arm with both Rias and Asia after your club activities, right? You've plucked two of this school's best flowers? You ought to get blasted into some fantasy world and melted by the first slime you bump into."

Hey, calm down there, Motohama. It was more

complicated than that. Asia and Rias had recently started competing for some mysterious reason, but I hadn't done anything. All I was guilty of was getting caught awkwardly in the middle. I hardly even had space to breathe!

Whenever that kind of thing happened, I had to ask myself whether I would ever be able to become a harem king. I had my doubts.

I really am useless. I can't even handle a single girl…

"By the way, Issei. What's happening with that bowling and karaoke get-together?" Motohama asked, regaining his composure.

Recently, I'd arranged for Kiryuu, Kiba, Koneko, Asia, Motohama, Matsuda, and me to have some fun on our next day off.

Asia and Kiryuu had agreed easily enough. Koneko, too, had been surprisingly willing. I'd been sure that she would refuse.

The real obstacle was Kiba. I'd explained everything to him, but given the current situation…

"Asia and Kiryuu will be there. Koneko's coming, too."

"Whoooooaaaaa! Asia and Koneko Toujou! That alone is enough to lift the spirits!" Matsuda cried. Yes, he *literally* cried, with tears and everything…

He must have been starved for interaction with the opposite sex.

Sorry, Matsuda. I'm moving further and further away from you. I mean, I'm living with a pair of beautiful young women every day now. That's not to say it was all sunshine and roses, however.

Slap!

Someone smacked Matsuda on the back of the head. It was the bespectacled Kiryuu.

"Sorry to break it to you, but I'm going, too," she said with a sour frown.

"Hmph. You're just an optional extra with Asia. This class already has a glasses-wearing pervert, right, Motohama? If

you’re going to insist, I suppose you can come along.”

“What’s that, Matsuda? Don’t lump me together with that filthy Perverted Glasses,” Kiryuu spat.

“Damn you! Motohama’s glasses are special! He can size up a girl’s measurements just by looking at her! You’re nothing like him!”

Kiryuu suddenly broke into a wry laugh at Matsuda’s outburst. “You didn’t think Motohama was the only one with that ability, did you?”

“—?!”

The three of us were struck by a sudden sense of unease! Kiryuu’s gaze moved down to our crotches.

“I see, I see.”

Hit by a sense of crisis, I covered my groin with my hands. Matsuda and Motohama quickly did the same. Kiryuu’s glasses, however, let out a bright glimmer of light in response to our frantic reactions.

“Oh-ho, yes. *My* glasses can size up a man’s member. From the teeniest to the most massive.”

Wh-what a terrifying ability! H-has she worked out the sizes of all the boys in class?!

I was utterly horrified, but the next thing I knew, she placed a hand on my shoulder and flashed me a creepy grin. “Don’t worry. You’ve got nothing to worry about in that regard. It would be too much for any woman if it was too big. Yep, both Gremory and Asia should be plenty satisfied by that.”

Whaaaaat?! This is sexual harassment! A girl is sexually harassing me!

“Good for you, Asia,” Kiryuu congratulated.

“—?”

Asia wore a look of bewilderment at this remark.

Come on, Kiryuu. You don’t need to tell her stuff like that!

“Geez, I guess I’ll have to spell it out. You see, Issei Hyoudou’s…” Kiryuu leaned over, about to whisper it in

Asia's ear.

"H-hey, don't spout that nonsense at Asia!" I said, pulling her behind me to protect her. I couldn't afford to be careless around Kiryuu.

Then again, Asia had already seen it for herself…

"Fine. Anyway, everyone except Kiba is coming, no?" Perhaps realizing that she wouldn't get any further with this conversation, Kiryuu returned to a safer topic of discussion.

"I'll try to convince him to come. He did say a while back that he might be interested in joining us," I stated.

Somehow, I was going to get that pretty boy to join us. We were going to have the time of our lives!

—○●○—

Once we'd finished our club activities after school that day, Kiba, Koneko, Saji, and I met in the park and changed into our priest outfits. By the way, our crosses were fake. Had they been real, they might've burned us or something.

The plan was to stroll around town dressed like members of the clergy. We focused on areas where there were few people around.

I was really hoping we'd catch a break and someone would take the bait today.

Time passed quickly and uneventfully. Eventually, evening was upon us.

If I didn't go home soon, I would have some serious explaining to do. The last thing we wanted was for the prez to know what we were doing in secret. The student council finding out was equally bad.

"Sigh. Another fruitless day," Saji said despondently.

Surprisingly, he was the one who was most enthusiastic about what we were doing. He really was a nice guy. We'd gotten off to a bad start, but now I felt like we could become

good friends. His mind was just as dirty as mine was.

I guess you could say he was to Sona's Familia what I was to Rias's.

Suddenly, Kiba, who'd been standing in front of me, came to an abrupt halt.

"…Yuuto." Judging by her voice, Koneko had felt something, too.

Shudder.

At that moment, a wave of icy fear washed over me. A hunger for death was emanating from somewhere nearby.

"Up above!" Saji shouted.

We all looked to the sky only to see a young, white-haired priest descending toward us with a longsword in hand!

"God bless a band of wandering priests, eh?!"

Clang!

Kiba quickly pulled out his Demon Sword, parrying the assailant.

"Freed!" I shouted.

"—! That voice! Is that you, Issei?! Ha-ha-ha-ha! What a miraculous reunion! So how about it? Has your dragon power leveled up yet? Can I kill you now?"

That psycho was acting just as insane as last time!

So that sword he's carrying is an Excalibur? It certainly made me feel as threatened as Xenovia's weapon had.

Kiba, Koneko, Saji, and I each cast off our clergy robes, revealing our school uniforms underneath. Koneko violently tore hers right off her body. It was a bit of a shame. She'd made for a super-cute nun.

"Boosted Gear!"

"Boost!"

Energy swelled inside me. This time, my job was to support Kiba. The plan was to charge my power and then transfer it to him.

I would try to leave the fighting to him for as long as possible, but if push came to shove, I was ready to use some of my increased strength on myself.

“Extend, line!”

Whoosh!

What looked like a thick black tentacle flew straight from Saji’s arm and sped toward Freed. A cute, deformed lizard-face device had appeared on the back of Saji’s hand. Its mouth was spread wide.

Is that “line” some sort of lizard tongue?!

“What a pain!”

Freed tried to mow down the black cord with a sideward swipe of his blade, but the lizard tongue abruptly changed trajectory and went straight for his legs instead.

Once there, it wrapped itself tightly around his right foot and refused to let go.

Freed swung his sword again, trying to cut through the restraint, but his blade passed through it as it would’ve done with thin air. Evidently, Saji’s attack lacked a physical form.

“You won’t slice through it that easily! Kiba! He can’t run now! Get him!”

Good work, Saji! He’d managed to tie Freed down! That psycho priest was fast on his feet, after all. The last thing we wanted was for him to escape.

“Thanks!” Kiba dashed forward, charging straight for Freed with a Demon Sword clutched in each hand.

“Tch! So you’re packing more than just the Holy Eraser?! Multiple Demon Swords must mean you’ve got Sword Birth! Wow, you must be pretty sinful to have such a rare Sacred Gear there!”

Despite what he was saying, Freed seemed to be enjoying himself. Time had done little to change his freaky obsession with combat.

“No flimsy old Demon Sword will save you here!”

Crshhh!

Both of Kiba’s Demon Swords shattered with an audible sound!

“Not against my Excalibur!”

“Guh!”

Kiba called up another Demon Sword, but it was clear that Freed’s Excalibur was just too powerful. It could destroy anything Kiba produced in a single blow!

“Kiba! Do you want my power now?” I asked.

“No! I can still do this!” he insisted. Judging by his tone of voice, he sounded kind of annoyed with me.

I guess I could understand why. Losing to Xenovia had wounded his pride. He didn’t want to taste defeat again.

“Ha-ha! What’s with the terrifying way you look at my Excalibur? Do you hate it, maybe? Are you *seething* with rage? I don’t know what’s up with you, but once I hit you with this, there won’t be anything left of you! You’ll be dead! Dead! You’re going to die—do you hear me?!”

At that moment, Freed leaped into the air. Kiba forged another sword, readying to meet him, and yet—

Crshhh!

The pale-blue aura of Freed’s Holy Sword dispatched Kiba’s newest weapon in mere moments!

Without pausing, Freed moved straight into a second strike!

This is bad! Kiba’s in trouble! My concerns were quickly put on hold, however, as a strange sense of weightlessness took hold of my body.

…Huh? Am I floating? I glanced down, only to find that Koneko was holding me above her head.

What is she doing with me?!

“…Issei, go and help Yuuto.”

Whoosh!

That petite girl hurled me through the air with her superhuman strength!

Koneko, I’m not a projectile! Don’t throw me*!*

“Aughhhhh! Konekooooo!” I screamed as I flew toward Kiba.

Dammit! Desperate times call for desperate measures!

“Kibaaaaa! Transferrrr! Nowwwwww!”

“What? Issei?!”

The moment I reached Kiba, I activated my Sacred Gear.

“Transfer!” it rang out. Instantly, my dragon power flowed into Kiba. A powerful aura quickly enveloped his body.

“…If you’re giving it to me, I guess I’ll have to put it to use! Sword Birth!”

Slash!

Demon Swords of every size and shape imaginable erupted from the ground, from the streetlamps, from everywhere.

“Tch!” Freed clicked his tongue in irritation and got to work smashing the weapons nearest himself.

Whoosh!

Spotting a momentary opening, Kiba took one of those fresh Demon Swords and disappeared. Using different blades as footholds, he was darting from place to place at incredible speed! All I could make out was a blur. A Knight’s speed really was impressive.

Freed, however, was following Kiba’s movements with his eyes! How on earth could his vision be that sharp?!

Swoosh!

Kiba sent brands and falchions tearing through the air, and all were aimed straight at Freed! As he leaped from one to the next, Kiba pulled them out of the ground and hurled them at his opponent from every possible direction!

“Heh! What’s this, a circus act?! You demon scum!”

Clash! Clang! Ching!

His face contorted in a frenzy, Freed struck down those airborne blades one after the next!

“This Holy Sword is called Excalibur Rapid! If speed’s all you can do, then I’ve already won!”

The edge of Freed’s weapon began to blur, and before I knew what’d happened, it was gone! I never would’ve believed something could move that fast had I not seen it for myself.

After destroying all the Demon Swords hurtling toward him, Freed turned next to Kiba.

Chiiiiing!

“Damn, I’m still no good?!” The two blades that Kiba had been gripping shattered!

“Time to die!” Freed’s deadly weapon came coursing down toward Kiba when—

Lurch.

Freed was yanked backward, throwing him off balance.

“I don’t think so!”

It was Saji! The lizard on his arm had retracted its tongue, breaking Freed’s stance! At the same moment, a faint light snaked down the length of that tongue, passing from Freed into Saji.

“…What?! Arghhhhh! Are you absorbing my powers?!”

Absorption?! Saji has that kind of power?

“Heh! How’s that?! This is my Sacred Gear, Absorption Line—the Pulse of the Black Dragon! So long as it’s latched on to you, it’ll keep stealing all your energy! Yep, right up until you collapse from exhaustion!”

Saji had a Sacred Gear, too!

It definitely looked like a nasty weapon. So long as it was connected to you, it would keep sucking you dry. Evidently, not even a Holy Sword could cut through it. I made a mental note never to get into a fight with Saji.

“…A dragon-type Sacred Gear?! What a nuisance! Those things don’t start off strong, but give them enough time, and they can unleash an explosive level of destructive power! Argh, scary stuff! There’s nothing more monstrous!”

Freed kept trying to free himself with his Excalibur, but Saji’s Sacred Gear remained unbothered. Maybe it was the sort of object that couldn’t be damaged by physical weapons.

Wait. If it’s a dragon-type Sacred Gear, does that make that little lizard a dragon?!

I didn’t fully understand how it worked, but it sure

seemed like one nice Sacred Gear!

“Kiba! Quit complaining! Just take him down! We can deal with Excalibur afterward! Seriously, that guy’s a menace! I’m getting the jitters just hanging around him! If we don’t finish him now, who knows what he’ll do to the chairwoman or me! I’ll weaken him by absorbing his energy, so you finish him off!”

Saji had come up with a good plan. To tell the truth, I couldn’t have conjured a better strategy.

Freed was a real danger. It was best that we took care of him here and now.

Kiba wore a complicated expression nonetheless. The reason was easy enough to guess. He was probably frustrated that he couldn’t win by himself. Surely, he understood that it was best for all of us to eliminate Freed as soon as possible, though.

As if having made up his mind, he forged a new Demon Sword.

“…This isn’t how I wanted to do this, but it makes sense to finish you here. There are two other stolen Excaliburs. I’ll have to sate myself with those.”

“Ha! I’m stronger than the other two! If you gang up to kill me here, there won’t be anyone left to satisfy you! Are you fine with that? Kill me, and you’ll never have the Holy Sword battle you desire!” Freed needled.

Kiba’s eyes narrowed at this outburst.

Nghhhhh. That pain in the ass! Damn that psycho priest!

“Oh, Sword Birth, is it? A Sacred Gear of unparalleled potential. Depending on its user, of course.” Suddenly, a new voice echoed across the battlefield. Turning around, I spotted an elderly man in the unmistakable garb of a priest.

“Old Man Valper…?” Freed murmured.

Everyone recoiled in shock.

Valper?! Isn’t he the guy Xenovia mentioned? The one who disposed *of Kiba and the other test subjects during the Holy Sword Project…?*

“…Valper Galilei!” Kiba fixed the old man with a hateful glare.

“The one and only,” the man affirmed proudly.

This is Kiba’s sworn enemy?

“Freed. What are you playing at?” Valper inquired.

“Gramps! I’m stuck! I can’t get this weird lizard kid’s tongue thing off me!”

“Hmm. Freed, it looks like your use of Holy Swords could stand some improvement. Try to make better use of the Factor I gave you. That is why I’ve been studying it, after all. Focus as much of the sacred Factor that runs through your body as possible into the Holy Sword. Do that, and you should be able to break free by yourself.”

“Oh? Is that all it takes?” Freed asked, his Holy Sword beginning to emit a glow. “Like this? Here goes!”

Snap!

He cut through Saji’s line with ease. The only thing holding Freed back was gone! This was bad! He could escape now!

“I’ll bid you all adieu! Our ultimate battle will have to wait until another time!” With those parting words, Freed—

“No you don’t!”

A figure swept past me at tremendous speed.

Clash!

This new combatant met Freed’s Holy Sword head-on. The clash produced a shower of sparks.

Xenovia!

“Hiya, Issei!”

“Irina!”

My childhood friend had entered the fray as well. Help had arrived in the form of our holy partners!

“Freed Sellzen. Valper Galilei. Blasphemous traitors. I will cut you both down in the name of the Lord!”

“Ha! Don’t mention the name of that hateful god in my presence, bitch!”

Xenovia and Freed exchanged a series of rapid blows,

but Freed quickly dug a hand into his pocket, pulling out a small, luminous ball.

Shit! That's his getaway item!

"Gramps! We're leaving! We've got to report this to Kokabiel!"

"It would seem that's our only option," Valper agreed.

"See ya later, Church and demon tag team!" With that, Freed slammed the little orb on the ground.

Flash!

A blinding burst of light filled my vision.

By the time I could see again, Freed and Valper had both vanished. Dammit! After all that effort, they'd gotten away!

"Let's go after them, Irina."

"Right!"

Xenovia and Irina exchanged quick nods before taking off at a sprint.

"I'm going, too! No way is Valper Galilei getting away!" Kiba declared, dashing off after the two girls.

"H-hey! Kiba! What do you think you're doing, dammit?!" I cursed.

He was seriously just doing as he pleased!

Koneko, Saji, and I were left behind. We dropped our battle stances and paused to catch our breath. No sooner had we done so than I felt a certain presence approaching from behind.

"I thought I sensed an unusual flow of power…"

"What trouble have you gotten into now?"

At the foreboding call of a familiar voice, I did an about-face.

"Issei, what is the meaning of this? Explain yourself."

I blanched. Rias and Sona were both scowling at us with clear displeasure.

—○●○—

“…Destroying an Excalibur…” The prez rested a hand against her forehead, clearly extremely vexed to learn what we had been trying to accomplish.

After the fight against Freed, the prez and the chairwoman had brought Koneko, Saji, and me to a nearby park. We three wrongdoers were kneeling formally in front of a fountain.

“Saji. You went and did this behind my back? What a handful.” Sona wore a frigid expression as she closed in on him.

“Ah, erm… S-sorry, Chairwoman…,” Saji stammered, turning deathly pale. He must have been terrified.

“Yuuto went after Valper, didn’t he?” the prez demanded.

“Yes. I think he’s with Xenovia and Irina… I-I’m sure he’ll call if they need us…”

“I wonder. His thirst for vengeance might be clouding his mind.”

The prez was right, of course.

She turned her gaze away from me. “Koneko,” she started.

“…Yes?”

“What were you thinking?”

“…I didn’t want to lose Yuuto…,” she admitted, baring her true feelings.

At this response, the prez looked more concerned than angry.

“…It’s too late to do anything about that now. I hope you both realize that what you’ve done tonight could have major ramifications on the demon world.”

“…I understand.”

“Me too.”

Koneko and I nodded as we replied.

We knew that we’d done something risky. Although strictly speaking, maybe we didn’t fully realize the magnitude of our actions. I’d had only a vague feeling that what we were doing was dangerous.

The prez and I must have been considering things on completely different scales. I had been taking the situation far too lightly.

“I’m sorry, Prez.”

“…Sorry, President.”

Koneko and I bowed our heads. I didn’t expect to be forgiven for my actions, but I still wanted to offer my sincerest apologies. I was really, genuinely sorry.

Slap! Slap!

I turned my head at this sound, only to see the chairwoman spanking Saji’s rear.

Whoa, what a sight, Saji!

“I think you need more time to reflect upon your actions!”

“Arghhhhh! I’m sorry, Chairwoman! Forgive me, pleaaaaase!”

“No. Not until you’ve had a thousand spankings!”

Slap! Slap!

The chairwoman’s hand was charged with demon magic, and she was beating poor Saji across the butt! It looked seriously painful! For a high schooler, that must have been tough treatment!

“Issei. Pay attention,” Rias commanded.

“O-okay!”

“I’ve sent my familiars to search for Yuuto. Once they locate him, we will meet him together. We’ll decide what to do next once we find him. Do you understand?”

“Yes,” Koneko and I answered in unison.

The prez grabbed us both in an embrace, holding us tight. I could feel her warmth and kindness.

“…How silly of you. You really made me worry…,” she said in a soft voice as she patted us both on the head.

…Prez. I’m sorry. Truly… Your kindness is almost more than I deserve.

I was so happy to be her servant. It was wonderful to have such a kindhearted master.

“Wahhhhhh! Chairwomannnnnn! They’ve wrapped everything up with a hug!”

“That’s them. This is us.”

Slap! Slap!

By the look of it, Saji’s spanking wasn’t ending anytime soon. He had a long way to go before getting that happy marriage he wanted.

“Well then, Issei, on your knees. It’s your turn.”

…Huh? P-Prez…? I thought she’d forgiven us.

Rias grinned wide as a red aura enveloped her right hand.

“It’s a master’s job to discipline her servants. A thousand spankings for you, too.”

My ass died that day.

—○●○—

The sun had set by the time the prez and I returned home. We’d seen off Koneko on our way back.

She’d apologized to Rias many times over, but I don’t think she regretted what she’d done. Truthfully, I didn’t, either.

As for Kiba… We hadn’t heard from him since he’d chased after Xenovia and Irina. I hoped he was okay.

My butt cheeks seriously hurt. I could still feel the whip of the prez’s love on my ass…

“We’re home,” the prez and I announced.

We took off our shoes at the door and were about to enter the hallway when my mom peeked out from the kitchen. There was something indecent about her expression…

The prez and I exchanged bewildered glances but headed for the kitchen nonetheless.

“Come here, Asia,” my mom urged as the person in question stepped out.

“Gkhhh!”

Asia was wearing a kitchen apron, but something wasn’t quite right. She was showing too much skin…

W-wait, seriously?!

Beneath that apron, she was stark naked!

Asiaaaaa! What a lovely—no, what an indecent outfit!

“M-my classmate suggested it… She said it’s part of Japanese culture… Th-that wh-when you’re working in a kitchen, you d-don’t wear anything under the apron… I-it’s a little embarrassing…b-but I want to learn how the Japanese do things…,” Asia mumbled. Her face was scarlet as she fidgeted from side to side.

Bah!

Blood spurted from my nose… Asia was going to kill me if things continued like this!

Competing with the prez already has her acting unusually provocative, and now this? I wondered who could’ve told her of this latest eroticism.

“Asia… Who put you up to this?” I asked.

“My friend Kiryuu… Don’t worry. I’m doing it properly by not wearing any underwear. It’s a bit cold down there, though…”

No underwear…

Asia was telling me things I hadn’t even asked about. She was definitely on the path to becoming a natural eroticist!

It’s a white apron, so if I look carefully, I can probably see through it to her… No! I couldn’t look at her with such a lecherous gaze!

“I—I knew it! That sick, bespectacled pervert!” I cried.

Kiryuu! She was the mastermind planting those immoral ideas in Asia’s head!

Part of me wanted to congratulate her on a job well done, but another part knew I had to tell that girl to cut it out.

Dammit, Kiryuu! There was no doubting her work as the fabled Craftswoman. Asia in nothing but an apron was one hell of a job!

“Hee-hee, she looks cute, doesn’t she?” My mom chuckled. “I’m behind you all the way, Asia. Ah, I remember when I was your age…”

Mom! What are you saying?! Hold on. Did you do this kind of thing with Dad?!

I really was my parents’ child. We were one erotic family!

Even if that was true, I didn’t want to hear about that kind of thing from my parents!

“…I see. So that’s your game plan,” the prez murmured somberly.

P-Prez…? J-just what was she thinking?

“Asia, you *are* a true demon. You’re a very sexual girl,” the prez said with a forced smile.

“Huh?! I don’t want to be a sex demon!” Asia cried tearfully.

Just what is going on in here…?

“Wait a minute. I’m going to give it a try, too. You’ve taken the lead on me, Asia.” The prez spun around and quickly left the room.

“Hold on, Rias! I’ll help!” Mom called out, following after her.

Hey! Just what are you all doing?!

“U-um, what’s happening? I—I didn’t…”

Blood still dripping down my nose, I rested a hand on Asia’s shoulder.

“Asia. Yep, it looks good on you. That’s all I have to say for now. Thank you. Thank you so much.”

She looked abashed at my repeated praise.

The two of us were alone now, so it was probably a good chance to get something off my chest that I had wanted to say.

“Asia.”

“Y-yes?”

“I’ll protect you from those people from the Church we met the other day. You don’t need to worry about them. If anything ever scares you, I’ll drive it away,” I declared.

I wouldn’t forgive anyone who tried to threaten her. I couldn’t bear to lose her again.

At that moment, she caught me in a quiet embrace.

Whoa! A hug from a girl in only an apron!

“…Issei, I don’t regret becoming a demon. I haven’t forgotten my faith. But there’s something more important to me than my love for the Lord.”

“More important?”

“You, the president, everyone else in the club, my friends from school, your mother and father—they’re all incredibly important to me. I don’t want to lose them. I want to stay this way, with everyone, forever. I don’t want to be alone anymore,” Asia confessed. Her body was trembling, even as she hugged me tighter.

Asia had always been alone before she’d met us. Neither God nor man had deigned to help her.

I vowed to be different. I was never going to leave her alone again!

“You’re not alone, Asia! I’ll make sure of that! We’ll be here for you always! Heh, I know this probably sounds pretty corny, but I’ll stand by you! So don’t cry. Smile. There’s nothing better than your smile!”

“…I’m so happy I came to this country. That I met you. Issei… Issei…,” Asia said in a sweet voice, burying her face in my chest.

I took her in my arms, embracing her, when—

“—!”

My hand came to a stop.

H-her back is…completely exposed! I should’ve realized that sooner. Asia was wearing only an apron, and that covered only her front side.

Your pretty little bottom is totally bare, Asia!

Ah, it was so smooth. Her pale-white skin… I wanted to rub it, to hold it, but my conscience always held me back!

What am I supposed to do?!

My hands were trembling in the air without anywhere to

put them.

Her butt?! Should I grab that plump behind of hers?! I can't do that… I mean, I want to! She might even let me… No. I can't stroke her hips in desire, not when I'm supposed to be protecting her…

My hand was snaking its way down all by itself…

"Rias kicked me out. I must have been making her feel embarrassed… Oh my." Having returned to the room, my mom caught sight of Asia and me and broke into a wide grin.

"M-Mom!"

"Oh my. It seems I'm interrupting. It's okay, you know? The kitchen makes for a wonderful battlefield. You two do whatever you want. Just be sure to clean up after yourselves, okay? I can't wait to see the faces of my grandchildren!"

Arghhhhh!

I couldn't stand this! I pulled myself away from Asia and made to flee the room!

Why does my mom have to show up at the worst possible time?! I felt like I would die from embarrassment!

"Issei, I've changed clothes," came the prez's voice.

I turned around and—

Bah!

Once more, a streak of blood shot down my face!

Rias was wearing an even more risqué apron than Asia! It was hardly large enough to cover her privates! It was so small that it really only barely counted as what it was supposed to be!

"Now then, Asia, shall we start cooking?"

"Y-yes!"

They both set to work in the kitchen…both equally nude from behind.

Blood wouldn't stop pouring from my nose!

Afterward, when Dad laid eyes on the two of them after getting home from work, he, too, broke out into a violent

nosebleed. Father and son ended up stuffing their noses with tissues together.

“I’m blessed. This is a great way to relax after a hard day’s work,” my dad declared.

“Yep, same here, Dad. I feel like I can just forget about everything else and be happy for a while.”

“You’ll have to marry both of them, son. That way, I can have them both as daughters-in-law.”

“Ha-ha-ha. I’ll do my best, Dad.”

The two of us enjoyed a joyful father-son chat.

—○●○—

After dark, I slept together with Rias and Asia, but the prez and I snapped awake in the middle of the night after sensing an unusually dangerous presence.

Rias jumped from bed and looked out the window.

Asia detected the same thing we did a moment later and woke up.

Glancing down from my window, I discerned the faint figure of someone staring up at me from across the road.

“…That psycho priest!”

It was the white-haired young exorcist, Freed. He was casting us a vulgar and provocative grin!

That bastard! What happened after the fight? What about Kiba? Dammit! Now I was worried!

He gestured for us to come out and join him.

“…A fallen angel,” the prez murmured ominously. She snapped her fingers and instantly changed into her school uniform. Then she headed for the door.

“Hiya, Issei, Asia! Oh, aren’t we looking sour! How are you? Oh my! Were you busy screwing in there? Sorry for interrupting. I’ve never been good at reading the mood.”

That was how that bastard priest greeted us when we

stepped outside.

"What do you want?" I demanded, but Freed's shoulders merely trembled in mirth.

Is that foreboding pressure we felt coming from him? No. He gives me the creeps, but that's all. What I felt was closer to something on the level of a high-class demon…

The prez suddenly glanced upward.

There was a figure floating in the air, back to the moon. It was a masculine form with jet-black wings… A fallen angel!

One, two, three… Why does he have ten wings?!

The fallen angel resembled a young man and was cloaked in an ornate black robe. Having caught the prez's attention, he let out a deep chuckle. "Greetings, daughter of the House of Gremory. What splendid crimson hair you have. It reminds me of your brother. It's absolutely nauseating."

Whaaaaaaaat?! How can he say that?! I can practically feel his hatred!

The prez's expression likewise turned cold. She really could look quite terrifying at times.

"How do you do, Kokabiel? You're one of the leaders of the fallen angels, right? My name is Rias Gremory, by the way. I'd also like to add that while in some ways the House of Gremory and I may be among the closest of individuals to the Demon King Lucifer, we're also among the most distant in other ways. If you're hoping to establish a political contact, then I'm afraid you're wasting your time."

Kokabiel?! That's who this is?! One of the head honchos of the fallen angels?! S-seriously?!

The same guy whose name showed up in the Bible?! He's the real deal! This is bad! We're in serious trouble!

On closer inspection, he looked to be holding something in his arms. I squinted and saw it was a person. Was he carrying someone?

"I have a present for you," Kokabiel declared.

Whoosh.

All of a sudden, Kokabiel threw the person he was

holding in our direction.

"H-hey!"

Acting on impulse, I moved to catch the body.

Thump.

The person who landed softly in my arms—was Irina Shidou!

She was caked in blood, and her breathing was labored. Every square inch of her body looked like it was covered in wounds! Had this all happened after she and the others had taken off after Freed? If so, what did that say of Kiba's and Xenovia's fates?

"I-Irina!" I called out to her, but she didn't respond, merely grunting in pain.

This wasn't good.

"She and her friends paid us a visit at our base of operations, so we gave them a fitting welcome. It's a shame the other two got away," Kokabiel said with a sneer.

So Kiba and Xenovia managed to escape…

"Asia!"

I set Irina down on the ground and called Asia over to heal her. A pale-green glow enveloped Asia and then the wounded Irina.

Gradually, Irina's tortured expression eased, and her breathing relaxed.

That's when I realized her Excalibur was missing. *What happened?* I wondered.

Kokabiel paid no heed to my unvoiced question, only saying, "I'm not so foolish as to bother negotiating with a Demon King. Then again, if I was to violate and murder his darling sister, I might be able to attract his ire. That wouldn't be a bad idea."

The prez glared at the fallen angel with contempt. "… What do you want from me?" she demanded.

"I'm going to lay waste to your territory. Kuou Academy and the town that surrounds it will be reduced to rubble. That should be enough to attract the attention of our dear

Sirzechs, wouldn't you say?"

…Wh-what?!

"You realize that if you do that, you'll plunge us all back into a three-way war among fallen angels, demons, and the forces of God, right?"

"Oh, I'm counting on it. I was expecting the archangel Michael to declare open hostilities after I stole his Holy Swords…but instead, he sent some no-name exorcists and a couple of amateur swordswomen. You can't imagine my disappointment! I suppose I'll just have to wreak carnage on Sirzechs's sister's little haunt instead. Perhaps you demons will provide more entertainment. It should be fun."

The prez clicked her tongue in displeasure. That was proof she was ticked off for real now.

Why did Kokabiel try to piss off Michael? Isn't Michael supposed to be second only to God?

Even I knew that much. That archangel popped up in a huge number of books. Kokabiel sure was trying to pick a fight with someone important. I suppose that much was to be expected from the leader of the fallen angels.

Unfortunately, he now seemed more interested in us, and all because he had nothing better to do!

"…You war fanatic," the prez spat with vitriol.

Unflapped, Kokabiel let out a joyful laugh. "Indeed! That's precisely it! I've been bored to death since the end of the last Great War! Neither Azazel nor Shemhazai was interested in a resumption of hostilities. Far from it—they've been throwing themselves into their crazy Sacred Gear research. None of those juvenile toys could ever amount to a truly decisive weapon! Although that kid's Boosted Gear might be another story… But that hardly justifies the effort necessary to search for all the little things." The fallen angel's eyes turned to me.

…Ugh… The pressure of his gaze was mind-numbing.

My whole body was shivering… Refusing to break my defensive stance, I called back, "…Are you guys chasing

after my Sacred Gear, too?”

“*I* have no interest in that thing. Azazel might, however. He’s quite the collector.”

Azazel?

He was a governor in the fallen angels’ political structure. Apparently, he was gathering Sacred Gears.

“More importantly, I’m going to launch a battle over the many Holy Swords that currently reside in your territory, Rias Gremory. Here’s to the next war! I’ve decided that the stage of the first skirmish shall be where Sirzechs’s and Leviathan’s little sisters go to school. Can you feel it? There’s magic in the air and chaos to be relished! What better way to unleash Excalibur’s latent power? What better battleground?”

This guy is out of his mind! He’s seriously spouting nonsense!

“Hya-ha-ha! Don’t you just love him? My boss is completely deranged! I’m starting to get pretty pumped up for this war, too! He even gave me these toys to bring to the party!” With all possible glee, Freed pulled out an Excalibur.

He had one in each hand! And another two attached to his belt!

“The one on the right is Excalibur Rapid, and this little beauty on the left is Excalibur Nightmare. Over here, we’ve got Excalibur Transparent, and that sweet little girl you’re healing was kind enough to hand me Excalibur Mimic! I can’t wait until that other one gives me Excalibur Destruction! Oh yeah! Am I the first person ever to wield this many Excaliburs? It’s all thanks to that neat Factor that old man Valper gave me. The fun part is that every one of them is in a hyper state, ready to be used. Prepared to give up yet? Hya-ha-ha-ha-ha-ha!” Freed broke out into a delirious guffaw.

“I wouldn’t have expected Valper’s Holy Sword research to produce such bountiful results,” Kokabiel admitted.

“Frankly, I had my suspicions when he first joined my plan.”

“What do you want with the Excaliburs?!” the prez demanded.

Kokabiel’s ten black wings fluttered as he began to glide toward the school. “Ha-ha-ha! Let’s have ourselves some bloodshed, Rias Gremory, sister of the Demon King Sirzechs!”

Flash!

Freed had pulled another of those blinding escape tools from his pocket.

Again?!

We’d lost sight of them for only a moment, but by the time our vision had returned, both Kokabiel and Freed were gone!

Dammit! I cursed, but it was obvious where they were headed.

“Issei, we need to go to the school!”

“Right!”

Our great battle with the leader of the fallen angels had begun!

Life.4

Go! Occult Research Club!

“Rias, we’ve raised a barrier around the school. It should keep out most of the trouble unless we end up with a particularly nasty visitor,” Saji reported to the prez.

The members of the Occult Research Club and the student council had gathered in a park a short distance from Kuou Academy. All except Kiba, that is. His whereabouts were still a mystery.

Asia had healed the worst of Irina’s injuries, but she was still weak, so she’d been taken to the chairwoman’s house to recover.

Saji was delivering a status update to the prez on behalf of the student council. He was carrying himself awkwardly. It was probably the result of that spanking the chairwoman had given him.

Apparently, after learning of what’d happened from Rias, the chairwoman, Souna Shitori, had summoned the student council members and placed a large barrier around the school.

Its primary purpose was to keep what happened within from affecting the outside town.

We were dealing with one of the fallen angels’ leaders, a figure who featured in the Bible and other religious texts. There was no telling what might happen.

“This should minimize any destruction, but to be honest, Kokabiel could destroy the entire area if he really wanted to. What’s worse, he seems to be preparing to do just that.

My servants have already spotted him releasing his power at several locations around the academy."

What…? I was left speechless by the chairwoman's report. *Seriously?! Are things really that dire?!*

Does everyone here mean so little to that Kokabiel bastard…? That damn fallen angel bigwig! I couldn't believe he wanted to destroy my hometown just to ignite some stupid, ancient conflict.

Screw you, you psycho fallen angel! You can't just go around doing whatever you want like that!

I wanted to live happily here with Rias and Asia! This guy had gotten me beyond infuriated.

"In order to limit the fallen angels' ability to attack, my servants and I will continue to erect more barriers," the chairwoman continued. "We want to reduce the damage as much as possible… It pains me to put the academy in harm's way like this, but considering who we're dealing with, we'll have to do everything we can to stop him." She narrowed her eyes and glared hatefully in the direction of the school. That look was undoubtedly meant for Kokabiel.

The way the chairwoman was speaking, it sounded like she thought Kuou Academy being destroyed was inevitable. I wondered if this was the last I'd see of my school—of *our* school.

"Thank you, Sona. We'll take care of the rest."

"Rias, you're dealing with a monster of unimaginable power. You can't win. It isn't too late to call your brother," the chairwoman insisted.

The prez shook her head. "You haven't called your sister, either," she replied.

"That's different… Your brother loves you. Lord Sirzechs would definitely come. Which is why—"

"I've already approached him," Akeno interrupted.

"Akeno!" Rias exclaimed in disapproval.

Akeno, however, wore an unusually angry expression. "Rias, I can understand that you don't want to trouble Lord

Sirzechs. I know you want to handle your territory yourself, perhaps even more so after the recent trouble with your family, but the situation has changed now that a fallen-angel leader is involved. This is far beyond what we can handle on our own. Let's accept the Demon King's assistance."

I'd never seen Akeno speak up against the prez before. My guess had been right. She did call Rias by her first name in private.

The prez looked like she wanted to say something back but eventually let out a deep sigh and nodded in silent acquiescence.

Only then did Akeno flash the other girl the joyful smile she usually wore. "Thank you for your understanding, President. Lady Sona, Lord Sirzechs's reinforcements should arrive in a little over one hour."

"An hour… I understand. In the meantime, we, the student council, in the name of the Sitri Familia, will maintain the barrier."

Hearing the chairwoman's decision, Rias, too, looked to have made up her mind. "…One hour. I'm afraid we must take the offensive, my dear servants. It's our job to cross through the barrier and attract Kokabiel's attention. Unlike when we were fighting Riser Phenex, this battle will be one of life and death! But I'll never forgive any of you if you die! I want everyone to come out of this alive. We've got many more school days ahead of us!"

"Okay!" we responded with resolute unity!

"I'm counting on you, Hyoudou!" Saji called.

"As if I didn't already know!" I replied. "You should worry more about your ass!"

"Shut up! It hurts more when you talk about it! And the same goes for you anyway!"

Ugh! I did feel a faint tingle in my bruised buttocks when he said that.

"Heh. The prez expresses her love in some intense ways. Well, I guess this situation is holding our asses to the fire,

huh?”

“Come on—don’t joke about that. By the way, where’s Kiba?” Saji inquired.

“I’m sure he’s safe,” I said with confidence.

“Right. He has to be.”

I bumped fists with Saji as we wished each other well.

It was time to fight, time to throw our cards on the table!

“It’s up to you, kid. So you’re fighting Kokabiel? Don’t let down your guard. Show him what you’re made of.”

Roger that, Ddraig. Let’s show him together!

That fallen angel wanted a fight with God and a Demon King, but instead, he was going to know the wrath of a dragon!

—○●○—

We entered the school through the main gate.

The moment we stepped inside, I used my Promotion ability to go from a Pawn to a Queen, and I felt my power multiply. That said, I didn’t have much experience as a Queen, so I was in no way comparable to Akeno’s level of skill.

The bizarre scene unfolding before me left me utterly speechless.

Four swords were floating in the center of the school grounds. Each was emitting a brilliant, empyreal light. The quartet of blades hovered at the center of a threatening magic circle that covered the entire area.

Standing in the middle of the four weapon was Valper Galilei.

What’s that old geezer up to now?

“What on earth…?” I murmured in bewilderment.

“I’m combining the four Excaliburs into one,” Valper explained, as if he found the idea somehow amusing.

“Valper, how much longer will it take to fuse them?”

“—!”

Another voice had sounded from up above! We all glanced in its direction and found Kokabiel hovering in the air with the moon to his back.

He was staring down at us all, perched on a seat that appeared to be suspended in the sky. I guess that was one of his angel powers. He was sitting cross-legged, as if he had all the time in the world to spare.

“Not even ten minutes, Kokabiel.”

“I see. As you were.” The fallen angel turned his gaze to the prez. “Is Sirzechs coming? Or Serafall, perhaps?”

“We’re here in my brother’s and Lady Leviathan’s stead. You can—”

Whoosh! Booooooooooom!

There was a sudden gust of wind, followed by a thunderous explosion.

At the source of that blast was the gymnasium—or rather, the place where the gymnasium had been. It was completely gone! Somehow, they’d blown it away!

“How boring. Oh well. I’ll have to find another way to amuse myself.”

A huge pillar of light jutted out of the ground from where the gymnasium had been standing.

Is that a spear of light? Th-this has to be a joke, right…? I-it’s too damn big! The spear that Raynare had used to kill me was like a toothpick compared to this one.

If any of us took a direct hit from something like that…

“Are you scared, kid?” Ddraig asked, speaking directly to my mind.

Of course, I am! Just look at the size of that thing! This is way beyond anything I can handle!

“Yeah. He’s on a whole different scale. Kokabiel’s so old and powerful that his name even pops up in the Bible. Plus, he fought God and the Demon Kings of ages past and survived.”

Can we even win? I thought in question. *Do I even stand*

a chance?

"I'll take him down, even if I need to turn most of your body into a dragon to do so. Should I prove incapable of defeating him, I promise I'll at least hurt him badly enough to stall until the Demon King arrives. He can handle the rest."

That Ddraig was saying such things was a testament to how powerful Kokabiel was.

I steeled myself to be ready for whatever came. I did have my armor as a last resort, although it would last for only ten seconds.

The power of my Balance Breaker was close to limitless, and it allowed me to overcome my physical and demonic boundaries once released. After activating it, my Sacred Gear became unusable for the next three days, however.

Using it was really only an option in an all-or-nothing sort of situation.

"Now then, why don't we play a little game? I've brought a pet with me from the depths of Hell," Kokabiel said, snapping his fingers.

Immediately, there came a deep rumbling. The ground violently shook as something approached from the darkness.

I'd prepared myself for a lot of things, but not the arrival of that creature.

It must have been eight—no, ten meters in length, with a huge jet-black body. It stood on four massive, thick legs. Each one sported claws so sharp that it felt like they could rend my back if I stared at them for too long.

Its bloodred eyes glistened in the dark of night. Rows of terrible fangs protruded from its gaping maw. With each breath, the monster exhaled a plume of steam that seeped out from the gaps between those daggerlike incisors.

If I had to compare it to something, I'd say it most resembled a dog.

Don't get me wrong, though—it definitely wasn't some

friendly pooch. I mean, what kind of animal had three heads?!

Rooooooaaaaarrrrr!

Its howl was so powerful that the ground shook beneath my feet! Each of those three heads had loosed its bellowing cry at the same time!

“Cerberus!” the prez exclaimed in dismay.

“Cerberus?”

“It’s a famous hound monster that guards the gates of Hell.”

Th-the gates of Hell…?! Could there be anything more ominous?!

“It’s supposed to live only on the pathway to the underworld. How could Kokabiel have brought it here?!” Rias couldn’t believe her eyes.

“Is it that bad?” I asked, almost too scared to hear the answer.

“We don’t have any choice! We’re going to have to destroy it, Issei!”

Rias was getting fired up! That meant I was, too!

“Got it, Prez! Let’s do this, Boosted Gear!”

“Boost!”

All right, you overgrown pup! Looks like you’re in need of some proper training!

At that moment, the prez rested a hand on my shoulder. “Issei, we’ll take the lead.”

“You want me to charge my power and finish it off?” I assumed.

The prez shook her head. “No, I want you to support us. Transfer your boosted power to your allies. Your Boosted Gear works to dramatically increase the skills and capabilities of your teammates just as much as it can improve your own performance.”

She wanted me to use my Gift technique to empower everyone else.

It was the right idea. Akeno and Rias could do way more

than I ever could. Transferring my boosted power to them was sure to be incredible. The same would be true if I passed my strength over to Asia. Doing so would cause her healing abilities to jump to an astounding level.

Basically, my job in the fight was to use my exponentially increasing energy to boost my allies' abilities!

I had to wonder if that would work against someone as mighty as Kokabiel, though. It may not have been enough to wound him, but I hoped it'd at least give us what we needed to protect ourselves from his attacks.

"By the way, Issei, including your own power-up, how many times can you transfer your power?" the prez asked.

There was a limit to the number of times I could use the Boosted Gear in one sitting. Sacred Gears with incredible potential weren't without their shortcomings, I suppose. The more I used it, the greater the effect it would have on my body.

If I was to use it to exhaustion, it would stop functioning, and I'd be sapped of all strength.

"As I am now, three or four transfers are about all I can muster. I might pass out after the fourth time, though, so the best I can probably do is three."

"I see. Then we can't afford to waste even a single shot."

Sorry, Prez…

I could probably stretch it out a bit if I didn't transfer my entire power, but I doubted that would be a sound strategy given our present opponent.

As I thought about it, I began to feel that I myself had become a strategic item in the impending battle, but I was fine with that.

"Akeno!"

Flap!

The prez's wings shot out of her back as she soared up into the sky with Akeno.

"Graoooooo!"

Cerberus let out a menacing howl and leaped after them!

“Roooooaaaaarrrrrrr!”

One of the creature’s three heads locked on to the prez and breathed a gout of flame!

Whoa! That thing really is a monster!

“Too easy.” Akeno placed herself in the path of that blast and froze it into solid ice. That was our Queen for you!

“Eat this!” The prez leaped out from behind Akeno, unleashing a huge black mass of demonic power at the hellhound. It was a burst of pure destruction. That ability of Rias’s could annihilate anything.

Boooooooooom!

One of the monster’s other heads loosed another ball of fire. It collided with Rias’s attack in midair, producing a violent explosion!

At the same time, the third head shot out a fireball of its own!

Dammit! Three consecutive strikes?!

The force of Cerberus’s attacks began to push back Rias’s. Seizing upon its growing advantage, Cerberus prepared to launch another barrage. It looked like all it would take to overwhelm the prez was one more burst of fire!

“Not a chance.”

Wham!

Koneko dived in from the side and landed a fierce punch straight to one of the creature’s three heads!

Believe me when I say it was an incredible sound. I was suddenly reminded why getting in Koneko’s way was a bad idea.

“I think you want more!” Akeno pointed up to the sky, which instantly erupted in a brilliant burst of lightning.

Next, she directed her hand to Cerberus—

Bang!

There was a powerful flash of light, and Cerberus was engulfed in a violent barrage of bolts! Akeno had dropped an extra-special, overpowered blast right on top of it!

The prez charged in for a coup de grâce, but to my surprise, Cerberus survived. It had somehow sustained the blow to the side of its body, though raw black blood was spurting out from the wound.

Smoke rose up from the monster's cindered flesh, but its eyes remained aware and alert.

How can it keep moving after taking so many hits?

My Boosted Gear was still charging, by the way. I may have promoted to a Queen, but to be frank, that didn't even put me in the same ballpark as Akeno.

Basically, my stats and abilities as a demon were still low.

I had to get stronger.

Surviving this battle is just the first step! I swore to myself. *From there, it's on to become the mightiest of Pawns, just like I promised the prez!*

"Grrrrrrrrr."

My ears caught another dangerous-sounding roar from someplace behind me. Nervously, I glanced back.

"There's another one?!"

A second Cerberus stepped out from the darkness!

You've got to be kidding me! This is getting out of control!

"Grrrrr-rwaaaaa-rwaaaaa!"

The creature let out a deafening sound before charging straight for Asia!

I had to get her out of there! So long as I didn't attack or sustain any damage, my Boosted Gear shouldn't have reset. All I needed to do was grab Asia and make a break for it!

Unfortunately, there wasn't exactly an abundance of safe places in the schoolyard in which to escape.

"Issei, boost your own powers!" the prez commanded, giving me permission to use the boost for myself.

That was probably the best option here. Burning my stored power just to dodge an attack sure felt like a waste, though.

Still, if it was the only way to protect Asia, then I had to

do it! I made up my mind when—

Slash!

One of the second Cerberus's three heads suddenly flew into the air!

It had been sliced right off!

Who? Kiba?

To my surprise, it wasn't that pretty boy, but instead it was Xenovia. The dismembered head of the hellhound flew into the sky before crumbling to ash.

"I thought I'd back you up!" she called out before taking off in a dash and launching toward the second Cerberus's torso.

The beast howled in pain over losing one of its heads.

"Gwarghhhhhhhhh!"

Xenovia delivered the fatal strike, carving it clean in two. Smoke rose up from the wound as the monster's body began to disintegrate. That was the power of her Excalibur at work!

"A blow from a Holy Sword deals critical damage to beasts like this."

Fwump!

Xenovia thrust her blade deep into Cerberus's chest to finish it off.

At that moment, the creature's body collapsed into dust and was carried off by the wind.

My gauntlet began to flash.

What's going on? I haven't reached my limit yet!

Ddraig answered, *"It's telling you that if you transfer your current power to Rias Gremory or Akeno Himejima, one of them will be able to defeat Cerberus."*

Seriously? Has it always had such a convenient feature?

"You and your Sacred Gear continue to evolve and change with each passing day. It's giving you what you wanted. You didn't know how far to boost, so it's telling you."

Ddraig was right about that. Did this mean my Sacred

Gear was compensating for my weaknesses? That was a thought for another time. What was important was that if I transferred my power now, my allies would be able to defeat the remaining Cerberus.

I looked up to where Rias and Akeno were floating and shouted, “Prez! Akeno! I’ve charged enough power to take down that Cerberus!”

At this, the two of them exchanged glances and nodded. They quickly alighted to the ground.

“Issei! In your fight against Riser, you boosted the effects of both the holy water and the cross at the same time, right?” Rias asked.

“Huh? Ah, yeah, I guess so,” I replied.

“In that case, you should be able to boost both of us at the same time! Transfer your power to Akeno and me!”

Hey, Ddraig, I know this is sudden, but is that actually possible?

“Ah. Two at a time should be okay. But each one will only receive somewhere around seventy to eighty percent of your stored energy.”

I hurriedly relayed that information to Rias and Akeno.

“That should be enough,” Rias decided.

“Yes, we can do it,” Akeno added.

“Do it!” the two instructed simultaneously.

I placed a hand on each of their shoulders and activated my Sacred Gear.

“Let’s do this, Boosted Gear! Gift!”

“Transfer!”

Thump.

I could feel an overwhelming quantity of power flow through my body into Akeno and the prez.

In the blink of an eye, the two of them were overcome with an enormous amount of demonic energy. They were both clearly taken aback by the level of strength now coursing through them.

“Let’s go,” Rias declared. Akeno nodded at her dauntless

expression, and the two took off. “Akeno!” Rias signaled after they were airborne.

“Understood! Shake the earth, oh heavenly thunder!” Akeno raised her hand to the sky and began to manipulate the lightning. Then she directed it straight at Cerberus.

As if foreseeing the attack, the hellhound tried to flee.

Flash!

That’s when dozens of blades suddenly burst out of the ground from seemingly nowhere, skewering the creature’s limbs and tying it down!

“I won’t let you get away.”

Our Knight had made his appearance!

Kiba had picked the perfect moment to reveal himself and use his Sword Birth ability!

Bang!

A silvery bolt descended from the heavens and smashed into the immobile Cerberus. Compared to Akeno’s previous attacks, this one was far larger!

That pillar of electrifying light enveloped at least half of the school grounds!

Booooooooooom!

“—!”

Whatever screams escaped Cerberus’s heads were drowned out by the explosion. The giant monster’s body was reduced to nothingness.

It wouldn’t have been possible without my power-up, but I could tell that the attack had consumed a great amount of my latent energy.

No matter how strong Rias and Akeno were, we’d soon find ourselves in trouble if we kept this up.

The moment that huge hellhound disappeared, the prez turned her attention back to the fallen angel!

“Take this, Kokabiel!”

Booooooooooom!

A huge surge of power rocketed from her hand!

“It’s gigantic!” I found myself exclaiming.

It was at least ten times the size of Rias's regular attacks!

Not only that, but it was speeding toward the fallen angel at an incredible pace.

As utter destruction bared down on Kokabiel, I thought for a moment that we'd won. To my dismay, however, he simply held out one hand in front of him.

Kzzzzzzzt.

Kokabiel was holding that killer attack back with a single hand.

Impossible! How can he deflect a blow like that single-handedly?!

Twang!

Kokabiel turned his palm upward and sent the mass of raw demonic power that the prez had hurled his way flying up into the sky, disappearing into the dark of night.

The fallen angel broke out into a delighted grin as he looked at the plume of smoke rising up from his hand.

"I see. So the Red Dragon Emperor's power is capable of boosting even Rias Gremory to such a level. Fascinating." Kokabiel gave an amused chuckle.

"It's complete," came Valper's voice.

At that moment, the four Excaliburs floating in the middle of the schoolyard began to emit a tremendous burst of light.

Huh? What's going on?

From his midair perch, Kokabiel clapped in applause. "And so four Excaliburs become one."

The burning, divine light of the swords spread throughout the area. It was so powerful that we were forced to shield our faces against the glare.

When I strained my eyes, I could make out the shapes of the four Holy Swords overlapping.

The seven Excaliburs had originally been one blade. Now four of those pieces were being reunited.

The blazing glow subsided, revealing that there was indeed now only a single Holy Sword. It was encased in a

bluish-white aura.

“Now that the four Excaliburs are one, the technique is complete. This whole town will meet its end in twenty minutes. And the only way to stop it is to defeat Kokabiel himself!” Valper exclaimed.

What…? I was left speechless. How could I not have been? This town, my home, was about to be reduced to rubble!

The magic circle stretching over the school began to increase in brightness and power.

Is it activating?! Seriously?! Everything I know is about to be annihilated! This has to be a joke! It can’t be real!

We couldn’t afford to just hold our position until Sirzechs arrived! There wouldn’t be a town left to save by the time he got here!

“Freed!” Kokabiel called out to the psycho priest.

The white-haired exorcist approached from out of the shadows. “Yeah, boss?”

“Take up your new sword. This shall be our final piece of entertainment. Show me what you’re capable of with four Excaliburs combined into one.”

“Right, whatever you say. You’re a real taskmaster; you know that? Ah, whatever! It’ll be an honor to use that super-awesome Excalibur to dismember the lot of them! Heh! Maybe I’ll see how many pieces I can cut these demon scum into!” With a deranged grin, Freed took hold of the Excalibur in the center of the schoolyard.

Can he actually wield that thing? I recalled that Freed had said something earlier about Valper having given him a Factor or something that let him handle Holy Swords.

“Knight of Rias Gremory,” Xenovia called out to Kiba. “If we’re still working together, what do you say we destroy that Excalibur?”

“Are you sure you’re okay with that?” Kiba asked.

Xenovia flashed him a fearless grin. “At worst, I’ll just have to recover the fragments of the weapon’s core after

we smash it. It might be a holy weapon, but if Freed's the one using it, it isn't a *real* Holy Sword. These things are only as strong as their users. His hands on that weapon make it nothing but a sword of heresy. He may as well be using a regular blade."

"Heh-heh-heh-heh…," came a chortling voice at Kiba and Xenovia's exchange. It was Valper.

"Valper Galilei. I am the sole survivor of the Holy Sword Project. No, strictly speaking, you murdered me. But I was reborn as a demon." Kiba's voice as he addressed Valper was calm, but his eyes raged with hatred.

Depending on how Valper responded, Kiba seemed liable to explode with blind fury.

"Oh, so you're the survivor, are you? What a strange coincidence, finding you again in this eastern land. We must be bound by fate. Heh-heh-heh-heh."

I didn't like that old geezer's laugh. It almost sounded like he was ridiculing us.

"You see, I love Holy Swords," Valper began, as if reciting some old story. "I love them so much that I dream about them. In my youth, nothing touched my heart more than the tale of Excalibur. You can imagine my despair after discovering I had no aptitude for wielding Holy Swords myself. And because *I* couldn't use them, I longed to find someone who could. That desire was so powerful that I devoted my life to researching how to create an individual capable of using one. At last, my dedication has finally paid off. I owe it all to you and your fellow test subjects."

"What? You completed it? Didn't you dispose of us all as failures?" Kiba demanded, his brow furrowed in anger and disbelief.

The prez and Xenovia had said the same thing; Kiba and the other test subjects had been considered failures. That's why Valper had killed them.

Contrary to everyone's expectations, Valper shook his head. "I had already realized that a certain Factor was

required to brandish a Holy Sword properly. The point of that project was to estimate its necessary quantity to ensure compatibility. While almost all the test subjects possessed the Factor, none had it in sufficient-enough quantity. Faced with this obstacle, I hit upon the idea of combining Factors extracted from different people."

"I see. So that's it," Xenovia began, grinding her teeth as if having learned something damning. "That thing that Holy Sword wielders receive when they take their blessing, that's what it was…"

Wh-what is she talking about…?

"Exactly, my little swordswoman," Valper answered. "What you received was the crystalized essence of that Factor, extracted from countless *donors*. Like this one here." Valper pulled what looked like a small glowing orb from his pocket. It shone brilliantly and was likely filled with a holy aura. "With this, my research took a dramatic step forward. And yet those fools in the Church branded me a heretic and banished me, usurping my research materials in the process. Looking at you, I can see that they must have passed on my knowledge to someone else. That bastard archangel Michael. He condemns *me* and then goes on to use my research anyway? He probably isn't killing those he takes the Factor from, though. He's an angel, after all. Ironic as it is to say, I suppose that makes him more humane than I am. Heh!" Valper gave a bemused chuckle.

Now I understood. That explanation was simple enough that even an idiot like me could follow it. Sacrifices had been necessary to produce Holy Sword wielders.

By the sound of it, Kiba and Xenovia had both been caught up in Valper's research.

"You murdered us all to extract that Holy Sword Factor?" Kiba growled, his voice murderous.

"Exactly. This orb here is from back then. I had four originally but gave three to Freed. This is the last one."

"Hya-ha-ha! I'm the only one who was compatible with

it!” Freed cried. “The others all kicked the bucket because they weren’t! Heh, I guess that makes me special, huh?”

If Freed was telling the truth, then the other individuals responsible for stealing the Excaliburs were probably dead.

Tch! If only he’d *died, too!* I thought. That jackass seemed to have a knack for surviving, though.

“You knew I was a tough one, didn’t you, Issei? No, no, no. I’m not going to croak that easily!”

Don’t read my mind, you psycho priest!

“…Valper Galilei. How many lives has your selfish research claimed?” Kiba’s hands were trembling, his whole body enveloped in a powerful demonic aura. He was incredibly intimidating.

“Hmm. If that’s how you feel, then I’ll give this crystalized Factor to *you*. My research has advanced to the point where I can mass-produce as much as I like later. But first things first: I’ll help Kokabiel destroy this town. Then I’ll gather every last Holy Sword from every corner of the world and mass-produce Holy Sword wielders to use the combined Excalibur to wage war against Michael and the Vatican. I’ll show those foolish angels and their blind followers who condemned the fruits of my research!”

So that was why Valper had joined forces with Kokabiel. They both hated the angels. They both wanted war. Could there have been a worse combination?

As if having lost all interest in the Factor, Valper hurled it away. The little thing bounced across the ground before coming to a stop at Kiba’s feet.

Kiba leaned down silently to pick it up, caressing it sadly, lovingly, dearly.

“…Everyone…” Tears coursed down his cheeks. His expression was filled with sorrow, but at the same time, it held a look of unquenchable rage.

That’s when it happened. The crystal began to emit a faint light.

It gradually spread and expanded until it had enveloped

the entirety of the school grounds.

Curiously, it then began to coalesce in various spots. After a moment, the light was forming the shapes of distinct people.

Before I knew it, Kiba was surrounded by boys and girls comprised seemingly entirely of that faint bluish-white light.

Could it be?

"All the energy flowing across the battlefield must have released their souls from the Factor," Akeno murmured.

Was that actually possible? Looking back, we had Demon Swords, Holy Swords, demons, and fallen angels together in one place. Perhaps it wasn't so unusual after all?

Kiba stared at the figures, his face lighting up with sadness and nostalgia.

"Everyone! I… I…!"

Yep, even I had figured it out. They were the children whose lives had been snatched away by the Holy Sword Project. Kiba was encircled by those who Valper had so casually *disposed of*.

"…I've always… I've always wondered. D-did I alone deserve to live…? But there were some of you who loved life more than I did. Is it really right for me to live comfortably in peace after you've all been denied that…?"

One of the spirits—a young boy—flashed Kiba a smile.

His lips moved, but being unable to lip-read, I couldn't make out what he was saying.

Akeno interpreted for me. "He says, *'Don't worry about us anymore. Live your life.'*"

Kiba had clearly understood, as water streamed from his eyes.

At that moment, the spirits began to move their lips together in rhythm.

Are they singing?

"It's a hymn," Asia whispered.

They were singing just as they used to… Still weeping, Kiba joined them.

In the midst of that cruel and inhumane experiment, this chant had been their sole way of holding on to their hopes and dreams.

Its melody had been the only comfort they'd ever known in their brief, torturous lives.

Kiba and the many spirits all wore smiles of innocent joy as they intoned the song.

—!

The children began to emit a glow. That powerful light quickly enveloped Kiba.

"We were no good alone."

"We didn't have enough of the Factor to handle a Holy Sword. But—"

"Together, we should be able to—"

Even I could hear their voices now.

I'd heard that hymns were supposed to be dangerous to demons. It didn't hurt at all, though, perhaps because of the sheer diversity of energy flowing through the schoolyard. The warmth of close friends, of dear allies… Before I knew it, I was crying as well.

"Take the Holy Sword—"

"Don't be afraid—"

"Even if there is no God—"

"Even if He isn't watching—"

"Our hearts will always be—"

"—One*."*

The children's souls rose up to the heavens, then descended on Kiba as a single, radiant burst.

"Kid."

That was when Ddraig called out to me.

What?! Can't you see we're in the middle of something?! I thought back.

"Your Knight has done it."

What on earth are you talking about?!

"Sacred Gears evolve in response to the emotions of their vessel. But there is a kind of transformation that can

go beyond that. When a vessel's thoughts and wishes undergo a dramatic shift, one great enough to influence the wider world around them, that change reaches the Sacred Gear, too. And when that happens, what you get"—Ddraig paused there, laughing lightly to himself—*"is a Balance Breaker."*

The light that seemed to rend the sky clean in two looked to be bestowing a sacred blessing on Kiba.

New Knight & New Rival

All I wanted was to live.

My survival was the only thing on my mind as I fled the research facility alone. Blood oozed from my mouth as I dashed through the forest.

By the time I'd made it through the woods and encountered a certain high-class demon, the fire of my life was all but extinguished.

"What is it that you wish for?" that red-haired girl asked me as she took me in her arms.

My vision blurring, I murmured weakly, "Help me."

My life. My friends. My future. My hopes. My strength. My talents. My—

All I wanted was to hold on to them all. Those were my final words as a human being.

"—I will keep on living as a demon. That was my master's wish and mine as well. I'd been content with that for a while. Unfortunately, I soon discovered that I couldn't cast aside my hatred for the Excaliburs or my resentment for those who'd murdered my friends. No, perhaps I *could've* forgotten my woes, but…"

But now, I had the best friends imaginable.

Issei, Koneko—you saved me from my quest for vengeance.

As I scoured the town for that Holy Sword wielder, I

realized that I'd found friends who wouldn't hesitate to help me. *Surely, that's enough*, I thought.

The souls of my fallen brothers and sisters were crying out for revenge, however, and I found myself unwilling to let go of the hatred that fueled my Demon Swords.

Now, at last, I was about to be released from those shackles.

"Don't worry about us anymore. Live your life."

My fallen brothers and sisters didn't want revenge. They'd never wanted it!

"But that doesn't mean this is over."

Unless we struck down the evil before us, similar tragedies would befall many other innocents around the world.

"Valper Galilei. Your heinous acts end here."

"Hmph. People have always known that research requires sacrifice. How is my work any different?"

There was no mistaking it; that man was pure evil!

"Kibaaaaa! Beat the hell out of that Freed bastard and his Excalibur!"

Issei.

"You're a Knight in Rias Gremory's Familia and my friend! You're my buddy! Keep fighting, Kibaaaaaa! Don't let your friends' wishes go to waste!"

He saved me, even without having anything to gain from it. Our master might've punished him for it, but he still—

"Yuuto! Do it! You need to settle this yourself! You're better than that Excalibur! You're a member of my Familia! You're my Knight! And there's no way that my Knight could lose to a measly Excalibur!"

"Yuuto! We believe in you!"

President, Vice President… Rias! Akeno!

"…Yuuto."

Koneko.

"You can do it!"

Everyone.

“Ha-ha-ha! What are you all blabbering about? Are you singing along with those puny ghosts? Argh, I hate that song! Just having to listen to it makes my skin crawl! Stop it! I’ve had enough! I’m going to carve you up into itty-bitty pieces with this invincible, fused Holy Sword!”

Freed Sellzen. The souls of my fallen comrades reside in you. I won’t let you abuse them any longer! These tears will stand as proof of my resolve!

“I will be a sword.”

My brothers and sisters. My comrades, whose souls have become one with mine.

Let’s overcome our limits together. Where we failed before, we can succeed, here and now!

“President, everyone, I will be your sword! This is my answer to your faith in me! Soul Birth!”

My Sacred Gear and my fallen comrades’ souls came together and began to take on a new form.

Demonic power and holy power intertwined.

I knew this feeling. My Sacred Gear, my comrades, they were calling out to me. This was the realization of my abilities.

An artifact of divine brilliance and evil aura took shape as a sword in my hand.

It’s complete. Thank you, everyone.

“My Balance Breaker, the Holy Demon Sword of the Betrayer. I will see that you taste the power of this blade that combines the powers of light and dark into one,” I declared as I charged toward Freed.

My strongest attribute as a Knight was my speed! Though Freed tried his best to keep up, all it took were a couple of feints to slip past his guard.

Clang!

Unfortunately, he still managed to parry my first blow. He was certainly a formidable stray exorcist.

My weapon was nullifying the power of his fused Excalibur, however.

“—! How is that lousy needle able to outdo an original Holy Sword?!” Freed gaped in panic.

“If that were the true Excalibur, it wouldn’t. But *your* Excalibur isn’t enough to break my friends’ will!”

“Tch!” Freed clicked his tongue in frustration before leaping backward.

“Stretchhhhh!”

His Excalibur began to undulate as if it had a will of its own, twisting violently through the air as it closed in on me!

That’s the ability of the Excalibur Mimic!

That combined Excalibur possessed the abilities of each of its four parts.

All of a sudden, the blade forked at its tip and surged toward me at incredible speed.

Such quickness could have come from only Excalibur Rapid.

Freed’s sword came at me from every conceivable direction. It lunged with short thrusts and swept with long, wide arcs, but I managed to block every attack.

Freed’s savage intentions made his moves easy to read, and there was no difficulty blocking them so long as I knew which direction they were coming from.

“What’s going on?! Why don’t you hit him?! Aren’t you supposed to be invincible, Excalibur?! Aren’t you supposed to be the ultimate legendary weapon?!” Freed shrieked. Impatience was clearly clouding his enjoyment. “Fine! Then let’s add this one to the mix!”

And with that outburst, the tip of his blade suddenly disappeared.

Invisibility? So now he’s using Excalibur Transparent’s power.

Even an unseen weapon didn’t mean much if Freed kept attacking from the same places over and over, though.

Clang! Clash! Ching!

My sword met his in midair, letting off a flurry of sparks. Once again, I’d deflected all the exorcist’s attempts on my

life.

“—!” Freed’s eyes narrowed at the displeasing surprise.

“That’s it! Keep him occupied!” Xenovia called out, joining my side. She was gripping her Holy Sword in her left hand and waving her right hand through the air. “Saints Peter, Basil, Denis, and the Virgin Mary, heed my call!” She’d begun to intone some sort of invocation.

Just what is she doing?

As I stared on in doubt, the air around Xenovia began to warp and twist. She reached into that distortion with her free hand and pulled something out from a space between dimensions.

It was a second sword, one that was emanating an incredible holy aura.

“In the name of the saints who dwell within this blade, I release you, Durendal!”

Durendal?!

That was another Holy Sword of legend, one just as famous as Excalibur. Not only that but, from what I had heard, its sharpness was unmatched. I had to wonder how she’d come to possess such an incredible weapon.

“Durendal?!”

“I thought you were an Excalibur wielder!”

Both Valper and Kokabiel failed to hide their surprise.

“Nope. I was always Durendal’s master. I was simply asked to take charge of an Excalibur for the time being.”

Xenovia readied both her mighty swords. Durendal was in her right hand, and Excalibur was in her left.

“Impossible! My research isn’t even close to devising a method of controlling Durendal!” Valper exclaimed.

“I’m not surprised. Not even the Vatican can create an artificial Durendal wielder,” revealed Xenovia.

“Then how?!” Valper demanded.

“Unlike artificial Holy Sword users like Irina, I’m a natural swordswoman.”

Xenovia’s declaration left Valper speechless.

Unlike my fallen brothers and sisters and me, Xenovia had been blessed from birth with the ability to use a Holy Sword.

“Durendal is a tyrant beyond all imagination. He carves through everything he touches. Unfortunately, he also doesn’t like to follow my commands. That danger is why I have to store him in a separate dimension. Not even I, his user, can handle him well. I suppose I should thank you, Freed Sellzen. Because of you, I’m forced to fight with Durendal and an Excalibur at the same time. I’m bursting with excitement! I hope you’ll be able to take more than a single blow. At the very least, I’d like to taste the power of your Excalibur!”

The blade of Durendal began to emit a holy aura exponentially more powerful than that of the combined Excalibur that Freed was holding.

It was stronger even than my Holy Demon Sword!

“Come on—how is that even fair?! Why do you have to come and spoil the party?! You damn bitch! Go to hell!” Freed screamed in rage. He charged for Xenovia.

Though it was still invisible, Freed’s sword was undoubtedly slashing back and forth.

Ching!

With a single horizontal cut, the combined Excalibur shattered. Not only that, but the ground itself had been gouged in two.

“In the end, it was just a broken Holy Sword. It wasn’t worthy of facing the Durendal.” Xenovia let out a disappointed sigh.

What incredible power. Her other weapon, Excalibur Destruction, wasn’t even in the same league.

“Are you serious?! Seriously?! You’ve gone and blown the legendary Excalibur to pieces just like that?! For crying out loud! Argh! Was I an idiot for trying to fix a broken piece of junk? I was supposed to see past the shallowness of humanity and the foolishness of the Church! I was sure I’d

overcome them!”

As Freed was losing his temper, I slowly approached.

There was nothing more that he could do. This was checkmate.

Desperate, he tried to block my Holy Demon Sword with the stub of his broken Excalibur.

C-c-crack…

There was a faint crumbling sound as his fused Excalibur finally disintegrated.

“Do you see that? Our strength has surpassed the Excalibur,” I stated.

Having destroyed the Holy Sword, I cut down the mad exorcist.

—○●○—

Freed lay on the ground, bleeding profusely, his body rent from shoulder to stomach.

We had surpassed Excalibur and seized victory. As I gazed up above, I felt my grip on my Holy Demon Sword tighten.

Rather than satisfaction, I found myself overcome by a loss of purpose. One of my reasons for living was suddenly gone.

“A—a Holy Demon Sword…? Impossible… Two diametric opposites shouldn’t be able to merge into a stable existence…” Valper Galilei’s expression was taut.

Right, I remembered. *This isn’t over yet.*

Unless I defeated him, he would continue to bring about new tragedies. I couldn’t allow him to make others suffer the way we had.

“Valper Galilei. Prepare yourself.”

I pointed my Holy Demon Sword toward him, preparing to run him through.

Come on, everyone. Let’s finish this once and for all!

“…I see! I understand now! If the balance between light and dark has been thrown into turmoil…that would explain it! The Demon Kings and even God Himself—”

Thump.

At the very moment that Valper seemed to have hit on something important, a spear of light passed right through his chest.

—!

“Ghck…” Valper spat out a mouthful of blood before collapsing limply to the ground.

I ran his way to check whether he was still alive—but he’d already breathed his last.

“Valper, you really were remarkable. Your realizing the truth just now was proof enough of that. But I never needed you. I could have done this myself from the outset.” Still floating in midair, Kokabiel sneered in mockery.

He was the one who had killed Valper.

“Ha-ha-ha! Mwa-ha-ha-ha-ha-ha!” The fallen angel broke out into a crazed laugh as he descended to the ground.

Immediately, an immense dread began to dominate my senses.

Filled with an incredible sense of confidence and an impossible power, Kokabiel finally approached us. With a dauntless grin, he looked to Issei and commanded, “Charge your Boosted Gear to its limit and transfer the power to one of your allies.”

“Are you trying to give us a sporting chance?!” the president shot back, infuriated. “Enough with the games!”

“You think this is a game? Ha-ha-ha, you’re the ones who are fooling around. Do you really think that you can defeat *me*?”

Kokabiel’s eyes alone were enough to root me to the ground. My whole body was paralyzed with fear.

…The Bible had often described the powerful intimidation that fallen angels possessed. Now I was experiencing it firsthand.

Sweat coated the palms of my hands as a cold feeling coursed through me.

This dread was nothing like what I'd gone through during our battle against Riser Phenex's Familia.

No, this was a battle to the death.

If I wasn't prepared to die, I would only be a hindrance.

Desperately, I searched for something inspiring within me. I had avenged my friends, but the battle wasn't over.

The spirits of my comrades had wished for me to live and be happy. If that was what they wanted, then that was what I would do.

I resolved to survive this impossible battle and live my life as a demon of Rias Gremory's Familia!

Lend me your strength, my departed friends! Help me brandish the Holy Demon Sword that your collective will brought to life!

"…Issei. Your Sacred Gear," the prez instructed.

Issei nodded.

"Boost!" echoed his Sacred Gear's mechanical voice as a bright-red flash emanated from it.

Everyone stood stock-still as we waited for the Boosted Gear to charge. Tension hung heavy throughout the area.

I was prepared to attack if an opening ever presented itself, but Kokabiel didn't show so much as a single second of weakness.

Charging at him recklessly would only elicit a lethal counterattack. In all likelihood, everyone else was thinking the exact same thing.

It was all we could do to try and slow our racing heartbeats while Issei's Boosted Gear charged.

"Ready!" Issei finally called.

Issei's gauntlet let out an even brighter burst of light. Its doubling ability must have reached its limit.

"So who will you transfer it to?" Kokabiel inquired with a playful curiosity.

"Issei!" the president declared, holding out her hand.

“Right!” Issei took her hand in his own and began to transfer his power to her.

They held on to each other tightly. Even from where I was standing, I could feel the sense of trust and affection they had for each other emanating from their clasped hands. The light from the orb on the back of Issei’s gauntlet flowed down his arm and into the president’s body. A powerful crimson aura began to surround her.

My skin tingled in the presence of that much raw demonic power.

An attack with that much energy behind it wouldn’t have left so much as a speck behind. Any normal opponent had no chance. Kokabiel, however…

“Mwa-ha-ha-ha-ha-ha! Excellent! Such a powerful surge of demonic power! At this moment, you stand on par with the Demon Kings, Rias Gremory! I see now that you are talented indeed. It was wrong of me to assume you were inferior to your brother!” The fallen angel bellowed with truly heartfelt joy. His countenance was tinged with madness.

He was looking forward to fighting.

“Take this!”

From the president’s outstretched hand came the most powerful blast of demonic power I had ever seen.

Vrrrrrrrrr!

So great was its force that shock waves fanned out behind the president. Ripples tore up the ground as the shot of raw energy sped straight for Kokabiel.

With one hand—no, two—he motioned to intercept it.

“Interesting! *Very* interesting, sister of the Demon King Sirzechs Lucifer!” Light began to gather before Kokabiel’s extended palms.

Krzzzzzzzzt!

The fallen angel met the president’s attack head-on. His eyes shone with a crazed, bloodcurdling delight.

“Nghhhhh!”

Inch by inch, the president's blast was pushed back until it began to lose its shape!

Not even that much raw demonic power is enough to defeat him?!

That's not to suggest that Kokabiel escaped unharmed, however. His dark robes had large tears in them, and his hands were exuding fresh blood.

Despite his wounds, Kokabiel was winning out over the president. Rias's shoulders were heaving. Her incredible shot had left her panting.

Even for someone as remarkable as her, it seemed it was impossible to deliver multiple strikes of such magnitude. Given how much energy she'd spend on the first one, it seemed unlikely she even had a second one left in reserve.

Our best option now was to have Issei boost up again and transfer the power to someone else, but if Rias hadn't been able to take out Kokabiel, then I wasn't even sure who could.

Akeno? Xenovia with Durendal? I pondered silently.

For as powerful as my new Balance Breaker was, I knew it'd take everything I could muster just to hit Kokabiel once.

Things might have been different if I'd had time to learn how to master my new abilities, but in my present state…

No, I chided myself. *I mustn't think that way.* I refused to let the president or any other friends die. Until my dying breath, I would protect them!

"Lightning!" Seeing that Kokabiel was still preoccupied with the president's supercharged mass of demonic energy, Akeno let loose with a barrage of electric strikes.

Wholly unperturbed, Kokabiel dispelled them with a flap of his black wings.

"Do you presume to interfere, you who possess Baraqiel's powers?!"

"…Don't lump me in with *him*!" Akeno's eyes widened with indignation.

She hurled down bolt after bolt, but Kokabiel brushed

aside each and every one of them.

Baraqiel was another leader of the fallen angels. Like Akeno, he specialized in electrical attacks. Supposedly, he was so skilled with them that many referred to him as the Holy Lightning.

Baraqiel was said to be on par with Azazel, a governor of the fallen angels, in terms of basic fighting ability.

Furthermore, he was also Akeno's—

Having completely nullified the president's attack, Kokabiel erupted with cacophonous laughter. "To think that you've become a demon! Ha-ha-ha! You have a delightful Familia there, Rias Gremory! The Red Dragon Emperor, a survivor of the Holy Sword Project, and Baraqiel's own daughter! Your tastes are as aberrant as your brother's!"

"Don't you dare speak ill of our Demon King. Your insulting of my servants alone warrants a thousand deaths!" the president cried.

Kokabiel sneered before challenging, "Then try to destroy me! Little sister of the Demon King! Master of the Red Dragon! The so-called Crimson-Haired Princess of Annihilation! I'm the longtime archnemesis of your kind, am I not?! Seize upon this opportunity to rid yourself of me or wallow in regret for the rest of your days!"

I had no idea whether my Holy Demon Sword would work against a being like Kokabiel, but I had to try!

Dash!

Xenovia, who until now had been waiting behind me, charged forward alongside me. "Let's attack together," she declared.

Side by side, we closed in on the mighty fallen angel.

Focusing everything I had into my blade, I struck at the same time as Xenovia. Her attack should have connected first, but Kokabiel conjured up a sword of light and effortlessly deflected the strike.

"Hmph! Durendal! Unlike that ruined Excalibur, yours is the real thing! Regrettably—"

“—Ah!”

Vrrrrr!

The air trembled, and an abrupt ringing erupted in my ears.

The fallen angel released a wave of energy from his free hand, lifting Xenovia into the air. While she was aloft, he delivered a powerful kick right to her stomach.

“Gah!” Xenovia cried in anguish as she was thrown backward.

“Its power is entirely dependent on its user, girl! You aren’t even close to mastering Durendal! Its previous users were forces to be reckoned with, but you? Ha!”

Xenovia righted herself as she fell, and she managed to land safely on the ground. No sooner had she done so than she leaped forward into another attack. Seeing my chance, I also moved in!

“Kokabiel! With this Holy Demon Sword, I will destroy you once and for all! I won’t lose anyone else!”

“Oh? A two-pronged attack with a Holy Sword and a Holy Demon Sword? Interesting! Excellent! Come, then! Anything less, and it wouldn’t be worth the effort!” Kokabiel spawned a second blade of light in his free hand as he prepared to meet us.

Whether it was my Holy Demon Sword or Xenovia’s Durendal and Excalibur, Kokabiel parried our strikes as if they were nothing.

Ugh! It seemed that the fallen angel surpassed us even when it came to swordsmanship!

Sensing an opportunity, Koneko hurried at Kokabiel from behind with a powerful punch ready when—

“Too easy!”

One of Kokabiel’s wings morphed into an edged weapon and tore mercilessly through her flesh.

She slammed hard on the ground. It quickly grew wet with her blood.

“Koneko!”

“Despite your heroic proclamations, your friends are still dying!”

I let down my guard as I watched Koneko fall, and Kokabiel immediately lashed out with one of his weapons.

Ckrnk!

“Argh!”

A crack had appeared in my Holy Demon Sword! The state of the weapon depended on my strength of will. If I allowed my concentration to waver, even for a moment, it would quickly grow fragile. The fallen angel had taken full advantage of that opening.

Thud!

A force rippled from Kokabiel’s body that knocked back Xenovia and me. Fortunately, I somehow managed to maintain my stance…but we were both gasping for air.

We can’t win. The thought had surfaced in my mind almost unconsciously.

Our opponent was simply too powerful. Even using my Balance Breaker, I couldn’t hope to match him.

I’d known that Kokabiel was one of the leaders of the fallen angels but still found it difficult to grasp that he was so dominant.

No! I said to myself. *I can’t afford to think like that. We have to win!* Winning was the only way we’d survive, and I’d decided I wanted to live my life!

Issei and Asia had rushed to Koneko’s side. Asia was already employing her Sacred Gear to heal Koneko’s injuries.

Thank goodness. Without the Twilight Healing, Koneko wouldn’t have made it.

“Kokabiel! We’re not finished!” I shouted, readying my Holy Demon Sword for another attack. As I did, the crack running down the blade disappeared. Gathering every ounce of energy in my body, I rushed in.

“Ha-ha-ha! Again? Fine by me!”

“Holy Demon Sword…”

Slash!

Suddenly, countless blades emitting both holy and demonic auras appeared around Kokabiel, surrounding the fallen angel. With this, I would be able to pin him and attack in one fell swoop!

“Do you think this will hold me?” With a fearless laugh, Kokabiel’s ten wings morphed into layer upon layer of swords, effortlessly crushing the Holy Demon Swords that I had assembled around him.

Damn! So even that was no good?!

Unimpressed with my attack, Kokabiel caught my Holy Demon Sword between his index and middle fingers.

“Is that it?” asked the man before giving a disinterested sigh. I tried to pull my Balance Breaker free, but it was firmly caught between his digits. Taking a different approach, I summoned another Holy Demon Sword, but Kokabiel caught that one with his free hand.

Refusing to quit, I opened my mouth wide and called up a third Holy Demon Sword that shot out from my throat.

Gripping the hilt between my teeth, I swung my head wildly!

As I’d expected, this third strike forced Kokabiel to release the other two blades and fall back.

Did I get him?

Looking carefully, I could make out a thin, horizontal cut across his cheek. A light ribbon of red had bloomed from it.

The best I could do was a single scratch. Kokabiel was certainly a foe worthy of his position among the fallen angels…

My friends were all exhausted, their faces filled with despair.

Kokabiel, the only one among us who remained composed, chortled in delight. “Even having lost the masters who you profess to serve, I see that you demons and servants of God can still fight.”

What is he hinting at?

"…What does that mean?" the president asked dubiously.

Kokabiel broke out into unrestrained laughter. His mocking tone was not lost on us. "Ah-ha-ha-ha! Mwa-ha-ha-ha-ha-ha-ha-ha-ha! Right! I completely forgot! Your bosses haven't told you the truth! In that case, allow me to enlighten you. The Demon Kings weren't the only casualties of the last Great War. God Himself was slain."

…Wh-what…? He has to be lying…

Everyone among us was incredulous, unbelieving.

"Of course they haven't told you. Who would want to admit that God is dead? Humans are such fools. Without God, they can't function. They succumb to existential despair and lawlessness. No fallen angel or demon has been able to convince the lowly masses. Though I suppose there are very few places where word of God's demise might leak out. Only a select few leaders of the three factions know the truth. Although it does appear that Valper worked it out just before the end."

…God is dead? Th-that can't be…

Was it true? The very notion seemed impossible.

If Kokabiel wasn't lying, then what had we all believed in during our time at the research facility?

"All that remained after that climactic battle were a bunch of angels who had lost their God, some demons bereft of their kings and most of their other leaders, and we fallen angels who'd been robbed of many of our underlings. Our forces weren't just exhausted—they had been reduced to a point where we all had to begin relying on humans just to survive. Alliances with mortals were all that saved angels and fallen angels from extinction. The more angels who succumb to this reality, the more fallen angels there will be. Without God, however, there will be no new pure-blooded angels. Pure-blooded demons are becoming a rarity, too, no?"

"…No… You're lying," Xenovia murmured from a short distance away, her strength visibly waning.

Her face was filled with such absolute defeat that I could hardly bear to watch.

She was a true believer, a servant of the Lord. Her life's mission had been to carry out God's will.

Faced with the death of everything she'd believed in, Xenovia had lost her reason for being.

Gritting my teeth, I began to ponder whether anything I'd fought for in life had been worth it.

"To be frank, there will never be another Great War like the last one—not unless someone deliberately starts it. That is how badly our forces were slaughtered last time. With God and the Demon Kings, the central figures in the conflict, dead, those remaining decided that there was no point continuing it. And all because that bastard, Azazel, lost most of his men in the fighting, he went and announced that there would never be another war! It was infuriating! Utterly intolerable! We'd come so far and were suddenly told to back off! It was absurd! If we'd kept on pushing forward, we could have won! Damn that Azazel! Fallen angels should not be wasting their time seeking out humans with Sacred Gears!" Kokabiel was speaking more to himself now, though his tone was no less indignant.

The truth of God's demise was more shocking than any of us could have imagined.

Asia was covering her mouth with her hands, her eyes like saucers and her body trembling violently.

Even after becoming a demon, she hadn't abandoned her faith.

"…The Lord is gone…? Dead? Then the love we offered Him…"

Kokabiel seemed genuinely amused by Asia's difficulties. "Indeed. He can offer you no protection, no love. He's long since gone. Michael is doing well, though. He's taken God's place and is commanding the other angels and their human followers. The system you people use to contact God still works, to an extent. Blessings and exorcisms function as

they ever did, just far less effectively. There are more people than you could possibly imagine whose prayers go unanswered these days. Your Holy Demon Sword brat was only able to forge such an abomination because the balance between God and the Demon Kings has collapsed. Normally, holy and demonic powers don't mix. With the power balance between the two thrown into turmoil, however, all kinds of phenomena are possible."

So it wasn't by chance that I'd created my Holy Demon Sword. It had only been possible because God was dead. There was a distinct irony about that.

Asia crumpled to the floor.

"Asia? Asia! Are you okay?!" Issei called out to her, taking her in his arms.

Her hysteria was understandable. She'd dedicated most of her life to God. Faith in the Almighty had even driven her to sacrifice her own life. I could only guess at what she must have been going through.

I, on the other hand, had spent most of my life fighting against Him.

Kokabiel, ignoring us, raised a hand into the sky. "*I* will usher in the next war, here and now! Your heads shall make excellent trophies to commemorate this day! I may be alone, but I'll see that the fighting resumes exactly where it left off! I'll prove to Sirzechs and Michael once and for all that it is the fallen angels who are superior!"

Lucifer. Michael.

They both featured extensively in the Bible and were said to be among the most powerful of beings. Kokabiel wanted to stand shoulder to shoulder with them. That was how strong he was.

Our opponent was someone aspiring to surpass the greatest angel and demon.

There was no way we could win.

We couldn't even come close.

It was foolish of us to think we stood a chance in the first

place, and yet—

I tightened my grip on my sword just as a dazzling flash of red light filled my vision.

Issei.

"Cut the crap! I'm not about to let you wipe out my town, my friends, the prez, or Asia just because you're hankering for some stupid war! Besides, I'm going to be a harem king, and I won't let you get in the way!"

I know you're trying to act cool, Issei, but that won't be enough here…

"Hee-hee-hee. A harem king? Ha-ha-ha, *that's* what the Red Dragon Emperor aspires to? Why don't you come with me, then? I'll *give* you a harem. You can take any beautiful woman you want. You can do what you want with her until you're ready for another!" Kokabiel invited, trying to tempt him.

Hmph. No matter what he says, Issei isn't the kind to—

"…"

To my surprise, Issei was frozen in place.

"Don't tell me you can be bought that easily?!" I exclaimed.

Wh-what is he doing?! I-Issei, snap out of it!

"Issei! Ugh! Wipe the drool from your face! How did you end up like this?!" The president was indignant. Issei really should've known better.

"…S-sorry. I guess the idea of a harem is my weak spot…"

"If you like girls so much, I'll give you something to remember if we make it out of this alive!" Rias declared.

"Seriously?! Th-then I want to suck your breasts!" Issei shouted without a moment's hesitation.

"Fine! That's a small price to pay for a victory!"

Flash!

The jewel embedded in the back of the Boosted Gear suddenly shone brighter than it ever had before!

"Hee-hee-hee. Those breasts are mine to suck for as long

as I want!” An indomitable grin began to creep along Issei’s face. “I could beat the living daylights out of God Himself right now! Ah, right, He’s dead. Ah-ha-ha!”

His gauntlet let out a blinding red light. The tremendous energy surging through his Sacred Gear was practically palpable.

“All riiiiight! Let’s do this, Kokabiel! Go down quickly so I can suck on the prez’s nipples, okay?”

That’s what he’s fighting for?!

Sacred Gears responded to the thoughts of their users. The Boosted Gear looked like it had reached a new level all because of Issei’s lust and perverted desires. I had to wonder if the Red Dragon Emperor was really okay with something so ridiculous…

The president’s face flushed, likely because of Issei’s absurd proclamation.

My heart cried out for her, truly.

“…This is the first time I’ve seen the Red Dragon Emperor grant his power for the sake of sucking on a woman’s breasts… Just who are you?” Kokabiel asked, squinting.

Issei puffed out his chest as he replied, “Rias Gremory’s Pawn! Issei Hyoudou! Remember that name, Kokabiel! I’m the vessel of the Boosted Gear, and erotic and perverted thoughts fuel me!”

Just a short moment ago, everyone had been filled with hopelessness at the disparity between our fighting ability and that of the fallen angel, but Issei’s wild boasts were surprisingly emboldening.

It was quite strange. Ever since he’d gotten involved in our Familia, it was like I’d found a new source of motivation.

I had never been a particularly hot-blooded sort of guy, but it wasn’t an unwelcome feeling.

The president, Akeno, Asia, and Koneko were all beaten and broken, yet they stood ready to engage with Kokabiel once more.

We hadn’t lost yet. It was still possible for us to emerge victoriously!

At that moment, we were all united in our feelings. That’s when—

“Hmm, interesting,” came a new voice from the sky.

The vice president, Akeno, skilled in reading the flow of energy, was the first to notice it.

She hurriedly looked up, and the president followed suit not a second later.

They both stared into the dark of night. At first, I didn’t realize what was happening, but the answer soon revealed itself.

A shiver of unknown fear and trepidation coursed down my spine.

What descended from the sky overwhelmed me with its presence, filling me with hopeless despair at its sheer power.

Flash!

If it collided with the ground at the rate it was falling, it was likely to cause an earthquake.

Thankfully, that never came to pass.

A glowing, white figure, unmarred by even the slightest shadow, appeared before us. It had come to a stop just inches above the earth.

It was covered in radiant white plate armor. Things that resembled jewels were embedded in various places across its body. Even its face was shielded behind heavy metal, making it impossible to read the figure’s expression.

Eight wings of pure light grew from this new arrival’s back. Their radiance cut through the inky black of night and emitted an unmistakable divine radiance.

That armored figure was strangely familiar. The color and shape may have been different, but it was identical to the Boosted Gear’s Scale Mail in all other respects.

No doubt, everyone else had realized what that meant, too.

Everyone understood who this newest entrant to the battlefield was.

"…The Vanishing Dragon." Kokabiel was the first to utter its name.

Indeed. The antithesis of the Welsh Dragon—the Vanishing Dragon.

My whole body was quaking. I was unable to move, left feeling as if the figure had grabbed hold of my heart. At the same time, I was fascinated by its mysterious brilliance. It was beautiful.

That being had captured my soul.

Kokabiel clicked his tongue. "The Divine Dividing, the Wings of the White Dragon Emperor, one of the thirteen Longinuses… If you've already activated its Scale Mail, then you must have attained your Balance Breaker. A no-less-dreadful weapon than the Boosted Gear."

…The Vanishing Dragon's Balance Breaker…

"…So you were drawn to the Red, were you, Vanishing Dragon? You would be wise to stay out of my—"

Before Kokabiel could finish his sentence, however, one of his black wings was yanked up into the air.

At the same moment, great globules of crimson spurted from his back.

"They look like crow's wings. A filthy color. Azazel's were dimmer, like perpetual darkness. Do you remember?"

My eyes hadn't been able to register it, but it was clear that the white figure had just attacked the fallen angel.

The Vanishing Dragon was clutching a black wing in its hand. Judging by its voice, it sounded like a young man.

"C-curse you! My wings!" With his wing plucked right out of his body, Kokabiel was beyond enraged.

The Vanishing Dragon, however, let out a faint chuckle. "They're no more than a sign of the fallen. And what does one who has crashed to earth need with wings? Or do you still hope to fly?"

"Are you defying me, Vanishing Dragon?!"

Kokabiel summoned up innumerable spears of light, but the Vanishing Dragon remained unfazed.

“My name is Albion.”

“Divide!” echoed a new sound, and Kokabiel seemed to immediately grow weaker.

A full half of the spears he had conjured vanished as well.

“That is one of the abilities of my Sacred Gear, the Divine Dividing. It halves the energy of anyone I touch every ten seconds. Your power will be my sustenance. You don’t have time to dawdle now, do you? If you don’t defeat me soon, you won’t even be a match for a human.”

So the legends are true…

The Red Dragon could boost its power and transfer it to something or someone else.

Conversely, the White Dragon’s abilities were to steal his foes’ strength and use it for himself.

Flapping his remaining wings, Kokabiel confronted the Vanishing Dragon—Albion—but was immediately thrown backward by a strike that looked as if it had moved at the speed of light.

The one who’d been toying with us was now the one being played with.

“Damn you!”

Kokabiel lashed out at Albion with luminous swords and polearms, but the White Dragon Emperor effortlessly vaporized them with a stroke of his arm.

The fallen angel was clearly struggling as his powers continued to halve.

“Divide!”

The voice sounded yet again. Kokabiel’s movements had become so meager that even I could have easily defeated him.

Albion let out a sigh. “…Now you’re less than a mid-tier fallen angel. I’m disappointed. I thought I might be able to enjoy this for a little longer…but I suppose it’s time to finish this.”

Flash.

With that, Albion vanished from view, leaving nothing but a trail of light as he moved straight for the fallen angel.

Thump!

The Vanishing Dragon's fist plunged deep into Kokabiel's gut.

Kokabiel doubled over and vomited blood on the ground.

Nothing about him resembled the overwhelming opponent we had been facing just a short while ago.

"…I-impossible… H-how could I…?"

"What are you spouting now? 'Impossible'? 'How could I lose'? What are you going to say next? *This can't be*? Don't make me laugh." Albion evidently found Kokabiel's reaction quite amusing.

"I've been told you're getting out of hand. Azazel asked me to bring you back, even if I had to do so by force. You've gone a little overboard."

"Shit! That's who's behind this? Azazel?! I-I'll…!"

Slam!

Albion's fist crashed straight into Kokabiel's face.

Ruthless…

The fallen angel crumpled to the ground, robbed of all strength.

A ten-winged leader of the fallen angels was lying unconscious.

Albion threw the man's limp body over his shoulders. "I guess I should retrieve Freed, too. He's got a few questions he needs to answer." With that, Albion stepped over to the fallen exorcist and easily heaved him over his other shoulder.

Having retrieved the both of them, he spread his brilliant wings of light wide and prepared to take off.

"Are you ignoring me, White One?" asked an unfamiliar voice.

It had come from Issei's gauntlet. The jewel on it was shimmering luminously.

“So you’re awake, Red One?”

The gems embedded in Albion’s armor glowed similarly.

Are the beings who reside in the two Sacred Gears communicating with each other?

“I wouldn’t have expected our reunion to be like this.”

“Nor would I. Though we are still fated to meet in battle, it seems our paths may cross a few times before such a day arrives.”

“And yet, White One, I sense little hostility in you.”

“You do not seem as belligerent as you once were, either, Red One.”

“Perhaps we have both found interests outside of fighting?”

“That is well. Let us enjoy ourselves for a time. There’s nothing wrong with having a little fun alone, is there? See you soon, Ddraig.”

“I look forward to it. Until then, Albion.”

The conversation was between the Red Dragon Emperor and the White Dragon Emperor. They had both said their farewells when—

Issei, seemingly unsatisfied, chose to speak up, exclaiming, “Hey! What do you think you’re doing?! Who the hell are you, and what do you want?! Thanks to you, I’m not going to get to suck the prez’s nipples now!” His look was incensed.

…Hold on, Issei. That’s *why you’re angry?*

“Comprehension requires strength. Grow stronger, my archrival. We will do battle before long,” replied the vessel of the White Dragon Emperor before dissolving into brilliant white light and taking off into the sky.

We all stood rooted in place for a moment. No one could believe how strangely things had been resolved.

The magic circle that Kokabiel had deployed over the school had already faded away.

It was over.

Even if we had a sudden intrusion to thank for it, the

town had been saved.

My eyes drifted to Valper's corpse, and I realized that things hadn't been settled just yet. According to Valper, there were others still employing cruel methods he'd devised.

What would I do with my Holy Demon Blade if I was to encounter those individuals…?

At the time, I wasn't sure. *For now… Yes, for now…*

Slap.

Someone struck me on the back of the head, interrupting my thoughts. I turned around, only to find Issei grinning at me.

"We did it, Mr. Pretty Boy! Hmm? So that's a Holy Demon Sword? It's a mix of ebony and ivory." He was staring at my blade with an almost childlike sense of curiosity.

"Issei. I—"

"Hey, we can talk about the details later. Seems like we should probably call it a day, don't you think? Everything's settled with the Holy Sword and with your friends, yeah?"

"Yes."

Thank you, Issei. You've done a great thing for me.

"…Kiba. We can all go back to our club activities now, can't we?" Asia asked anxiously.

Despite having learned that God was dead, she was still worried about me. Asia was truly the epitome of kindness.

"Of course," I began when—

"Yuuto." The president called out my name. The smile on her face was welcoming. "Thank goodness you're back, Yuuto. Not only that, but you've discovered your Balance Breaker. I'm so proud of you."

"…President, I… Everyone… You saved my life, and I betrayed you for it… I don't know how to apologize for what I've done…"

The president stroked my cheek. Whenever I felt despondent, she was always there to comfort me.

"You're back—and that's enough for now. Don't let their

wishes go to waste.”

“President… I want to renew my vow to you. I, Yuuto Kiba, as a Knight in Rias Gremory’s Familia, will protect you all with my life.”

“Oh-ho. Thank you. But be careful what you say in front of Issei, all right?”

When I turned around, I saw Issei glaring at me with jealousy.

“*I* want to protect the prez as her Knight! But you’re the only one who can take that role, so keep your wits about you and do your best!” he spat, blushing.

“I will. Thank you, Issei.”

“Now, then.”

Vrrrrrnnn.

There was a dangerous sound as the president cloaked her hand in swirling red energy.

…Uh, what’s going on?

The president responded to my confusion with a devilish grin. “Yuuto, you need to be disciplined for running off by yourself. A thousand spankings.”

The Demon King and his reinforcements arrived thirty minutes later.

In the meantime, Issei howled with laughter as the prez *disciplined* me.

The spankings may have been painful, but I felt as if I had finally returned home.

New Life

Several days had passed since the incident with Kokabiel.

As Asia and I stepped into the clubroom after school, we both jumped a little at the sight of a foreign girl with a green streak in her hair dressed in a Kuou Academy uniform. She was sitting comfortably on one of the sofas.

“Yo, Red Dragon Emperor.”

It was Xenovia.

"What…? What are *you* doing here?!" I demanded. My finger trembled as I pointed at her.

Flap!

No sooner had I asked than a pair of leathery black wings erupted out of her back!

Whaaaaaaaaaat? Th-those are demon wings! Wh-what is going on?!

Xenovia snorted in amusement. "I was devastated when I learned that God is dead, so I decided to become a demon. Rias Gremory made me a Knight piece. The Durendal might be incredibly powerful, but I guess I'm not, because I only cost her one piece. Oh, and I've transferred to your school. I'm a second-year now and a member of the Occult Research Club. So it's nice to meet you, *Issei*."

"…Don't try to sound cute while making such a weird face!" I cried.

"I was trying to act like Irina. Did I pull it off?"

"You're a demon now?! Prez, are you certain about this?!"

Sure, it must have come as a shock to learn that her God wasn't around anymore, but Xenovia sure made some snap decisions!

"Adding Durendal's owner to our ranks is quite the boon. Xenovia and Yuuto will be the swordfighters who cover our right and left flanks." The prez sounded especially pleased.

Tsk, so she's totally okay with it? I suppose not getting hung up on the details is very like her.

Having someone with a legendary weapon on our side wasn't all that bad. A Holy Sword would be a huge advantage if we ever had to participate in another Rating Game. With this addition, the Gremory Familia could soar to new heights!

"Yes, I'm a demon now. There's no turning back. Then again, have I made the right choice? Hmm, but without God, my life has no meaning. But was I right to join forces

with my old enemy…? I might be serving the sister of the Demon King, but…" Xenovia paused there and clasped her hands together. She was murmuring something under her breath for a moment but then suddenly keeled over. It reminded me of exactly what happened to Asia whenever she tried to pray.

"By the way, how's Irina doing?" I asked.

Am I the only one who thinks it's strange to see Xenovia here but not her partner?

"She returned to headquarters with the five Excaliburs and Valper's body. After we destroyed the fused Excalibur, Irina and I retrieved its fragmented core. With that done, our mission was over. The recovered core can be used to remake Excalibur via alchemy."

Kiba and Xenovia may have destroyed the combined Excalibur that Valper had created from the four separate blades, but it sounded like the true Excalibur had survived in some way.

"Are you sure returning it was the right call? And what about betraying the Church?"

"There would be consequences if I *didn't* return it. Unlike Durendal, there are others capable of wielding Excaliburs. Durendal is all I need. When I told my superiors that I knew the truth about God, they didn't even respond to me. Shortly afterward, I found out that I'd been branded a heretic, though, and the Church doesn't tolerate heresy. Durendal can't save me from being cast out. I suppose I'm no different than Asia Argento now." Xenovia chuckled in self-derision.

…Does the Church really go to such lengths to exclude heretics? They sounded pretty extreme.

"Irina is lucky. She couldn't join our fight against Kokabiel, but it's because of her absence that she didn't learn the truth. She's always been more devout than I am, though. I wonder what she might've done had she been there with us."

For Christians, the more devout they were, the harder learning the truth would be. At worst, they'd take it as the end of their entire way of life. Who knew what that could drive someone to.

"Irina is disappointed that I've become a demon, but I couldn't tell her it was because I'd learned that God no longer exists. It was an awkward farewell. We'll probably be enemies the next time we meet," Xenovia said, closing her eyes and exhaling.

I wonder how Irina's feeling about this…

Now that all the club members were assembled, the prez rose to address us. "The Church made contact with our side regarding recent events. They sent a message to the Demon King. I quote: '*We wish to extend our condolences regarding the recent events involving the unpredictable and dishonest fallen angels.*' It goes on to apologize for Valper's actions as well."

All they did was send some weak-ass letter of regret? I guess that's to be expected of our enemies. They were taking responsibility for Valper, so I was all right with it.

"I must admit, this academy truly is a terrifying place," Xenovia said with a sigh. "I had no idea that there was another sister of a Demon King here."

Another sister of a Demon King? She can't possibly mean… No, there are only two high-class demons at Kuou Academy. Does that mean—the chairwoman?!

I swung my gaze around to the prez, who nodded in confirmation.

Whaaaaat…? That was a hell of a revelation.

By the way, Rias's older brother had ordered some of his people to repair the destroyed school grounds and gymnasium.

Restoring everything in a single night was truly commendable.

As I thought about it, I remembered they'd built an entire replica of the school in another dimension just a

short while ago.

Maybe stuff like that isn't a big deal to demons… More importantly, why does my school have such a strong connection to Demon Kings?

"Azazel, the governor of the fallen angels, has similarly conveyed a message both to the Church and to the Demon Kings. According to him, Kokabiel was acting alone when he stole the Excaliburs. The other leaders of their faction claim to have been unaware of what he was doing. They sentenced him to be sealed for eternity in Cocytus, the deepest strata of the underworld, as punishment," the prez explained.

I guess that means we won't be seeing him again.

That was a relief. If I never again laid eyes on that battle-crazed fallen angel, it would be too soon.

"That said, the situation was only resolved because of the Vanishing Dragon's intervention. It would seem that the fallen angels wanted to end the disturbance by sending someone from their faction."

Yes, it was the Vanishing Dragon who'd descended from the sky toward the end of the battle. What's worse, it looked like he'd completely mastered his Balance Breaker. Unlike me, he wasn't a second-rate fighter.

As I was, I wouldn't have lasted even a second against him.

Somehow I was supposed to do battle with him, though—with the White Dragon Emperor, Albion.

I didn't know the name of that dragon's host, but I knew I had to train to close the distance between us by the next time we met.

"There's a planned meeting among representatives from the Church, demons, and Azazel's fallen angels coming up. From what I gather, it sounds like Azazel has something he wants to discuss. There are rumors that he wants to apologize for Kokabiel's rampage, but that wouldn't be like him," the prez stated ominously before shrugging.

It sounded like the fallen angel's governor had a big ego.

There's no way the three factions would meet unless it's something important, right? Whatever they were going to discuss probably affected the entire world…

"We've been invited, too. We were directly involved in the incident, and they want us to report on what happened."

"Seriously?!"

I wasn't the only one taken aback by this. Every single one of us wore expressions of mute surprise. Anyone would've been stunned after hearing they'd been asked to meet with the big bosses.

What are we going to do? What's going to happen to our world…?

That's when I remembered that this was a good chance to ask Xenovia something that'd been on my mind for a while now.

"…Is the Vanishing Dragon with the fallen angels?"

"Yes. Azazel has been rallying the Longinuses and those who possess them to his side. I don't know what he's planning, but it can't be good. The Vanishing Dragon is among the strongest of those members. He's said to be the fourth or fifth strongest fighter they have. That includes the leaders of the Grigori. He's already mastered his Balance Breaker. As things stand, he's much more powerful than you."

The fourth strongest?!

That explained how he was able to take down Kokabiel when we could hardly even scratch him.

It looks like we're in trouble, Ddraig…

Xenovia's gaze then shifted to Asia. "I owe you an apology, Asia Argento. If there is no God, then there is no hope for salvation or love. I'm sorry. You may hit me if that will make you feel better." She bowed her head in a strangely Japanese expression of remorse.

Her facial expression had barely changed, so I couldn't tell whether she was sincere or not.

“…N-no, thank you, Xenovia. I’m content with my life. I may be a demon, but I’ve met someone—I’ve met so many people who matter more to me than anything else. I’m just so happy to have been given this second chance.” Asia’s smile was as warm as the Virgin Mary’s.

Ah, she’s such a kind soul… I was moved!

Learning the truth about God had left her despondent for a bit, but the prez and I had managed to lift her spirits.

“…You and I are the only Christians to have learned of the Lord’s demise. I can’t condemn you anymore. To have fallen from being a respected Holy Sword wielder to an exiled heretic… I won’t forgive how quickly the Church threw me aside.”

It may have been my imagination, but I thought I saw a flash of sadness in Xenovia’s eyes.

“All right, I should be going. There are a lot of things I need to learn before completing my transfer to this school.” Xenovia turned around to leave when—

“U-um!” Asia stopped her. “We’re all going out to have some fun on the weekend. Why don’t you join us?” she asked with a radiant expression.

Xenovia’s eyes widened, but her face softened a moment later. “I would love to when I have a chance. But not this time. However—”

“However?” Asia tilted her head.

“I would really appreciate it if you could show me around the school at some point,” Xenovia admitted.

“Of course!” Asia replied, beaming.

I hoped that the two of them could become friends. Xenovia was difficult to read, but she didn’t seem like a bad person.

“In the name of my Holy Sword Durendal—I would like to cross blades again with you, Holy Demon Sword wielder,” Xenovia declared to Kiba.

“All right. I won’t lose next time,” he replied with a smirk.

Having confirmed that, Xenovia left us.

Kiba was welling with pride and confidence.

At some point during all the recent excitement, he'd undergone a dramatic transformation.

Clap!

The prez brought her hands together, gathering our attention. "Well, everyone, now that we're all here, we can get back to our club activities!"

"Okay!" we responded in unison.

For the first time in what felt like ages, we were back to our usual cheerful conversations.

Friends

"Gotta grab them all! The magic Dragon Orbs!" I sang into a microphone.

We were at a karaoke place.

"Hey! Enough with the *Dragon Orb* songs!"

"Dammit! At least do a duet with Asia, you sex fiend!"

Matsuda and Motohama were laying into me.

Asia looked to be enjoying herself. Koneko wasn't paying any attention to the karaoke, though. Instead, she was stuffing herself with ice cream and pizza. The glasses-clad Kiryuu was deliberating over what song she wanted to sing.

As for Kiba—he was elegantly sipping a cup of coffee.

Tch! Does that damn pretty boy have to act cool everywhere he goes?!

The seven of us were making full use of our day off and had made a plan to enjoy the entire afternoon.

We'd all met in front of the station. Matsuda was thirty minutes late, so Motohama, Kiryuu, and I had decided to tease him about it a little before we headed for the bowling alley!

There, we wore ourselves out playing four full games. Afterward, we made our way to the karaoke place. We'd been taking turns at the mic for quite a while now.

Only Asia and Kiba had yet to take a turn, but I knew I'd get them to sing something sooner or later. Most importantly, I *had* to do a duet with Asia! What could be better than singing with a blond-haired beauty?

To make things even better, she was wearing a gothic Lolita outfit today. You have to trust me when I say she was just too cute!

That had been Kiryuu's work. In the Craftswoman's hands, Asia, the former Christian, had been given a sophisticated makeover!

"I could recite the Holy Book," Asia suggested.

Please don't. You'll end up sending Kiba, Koneko, and me up to Heaven if you do that.

I had invited Saji to join us, but he had turned down the offer. "The chairwoman has forbidden me from associating with girls!" he'd said tearfully.

It must have been tough being a member of the student council and the chairwoman's Familia.

After finishing my song, I took a mouthful of fruit juice to soothe my parched throat. I had belted my heart out.

The prez and Akeno had apparently gone out shopping together, and so they hadn't joined us.

A short time ago, Rias had sent me a text message that read, *I'm shopping for swimsuits. I'll pick out something you'll like*. She'd even ended it with a heart emoji. My nose almost exploded after realizing she'd added a photo from the fitting room. Heh, Rias sure was erotic.

It wasn't long now until the academy's pool opened. The prez had even given us all permission to use it as much as we liked on our days off.

I eagerly awaited seeing Rias in her new bathing suit. Akeno too!

Whoa! Two erotic ladies clad in sexy beachwear?!

I couldn't stop drooling! Summer couldn't come fast enough!

"…Issei. Your nose is bleeding," Koneko said with her

piercing gaze. “…You were thinking about something obscene.”

Right again, Koneko!

“Oh? I see you’re going up a few sizes there…”

Heeeeey! Kiryuu! Don’t use your perverted ability on me now!

“…Were you thinking about the president?” Asia asked, displeased.

Her deductive reasoning is getting a little too *good…*

“Ah-ha-ha-ha, it’s nothing! A-anyway, I’ve got to go to the toilet!” I said, fleeing the room.

After I’d taken care of my nosebleed, I spotted Kiba sitting on a chair outside our rented karaoke room.

“Huh? Did something happen?” I asked.

“Yeah. I guess you could say that.”

I sat down beside him. “Ah, I’m exhausted. I guess we overdid it a little.”

“We might have gotten a bit carried away at the bowling alley.”

“That’s for sure.”

We both chuckled at our casual conversation.

At that moment, Kiba’s expression turned serious. “Issei, there’s something I’ve been meaning to say: thank you.”

He waited for me so he could express his gratitude?

“…Don’t worry about it. Your old friends forgave you. So did the prez and everyone else. Everything’s good.”

“…Issei.”

Ugh. Don’t look at me with those glistening eyes! Y-you’re creeping me out!

“W-want to see a cool party trick?” I asked, hoping to change the mood.

“Oh? I didn’t know you had one.”

“You bet I do. I can sing the *Dragon Orb* theme on loop for an entire day!”

“I suppose I have no choice but to accept.”

“Come on. I think it’s time for an Occult Research Club Pawn and Knight duet!”

“If you say so.”

Together we returned to the others and took up a pair of microphones.

Not to brag, but our duet was pretty good.

It was also the first time I ever saw Kiba break into a sincere, heartfelt smile.

A few days later, Kiryuu circulated a photo of our heated singing around the school, further fueling the rumors of our romantic involvement.

No good deed goes unpunished, I suppose…

Afterword

“Yes… That’s it… Feast on my Excalibur (×7)…”

Long time no see. Ishibumi here. We’re finally at the third volume. Things are moving pretty fast, wouldn’t you say?

I know the title of this one makes it sound like a BL story, and I suppose this volume’s plot and that final scene with Kiba and Issei don’t do much to change that. *Excalibur of the Moonlit Schoolyard* was meant to foreshadow that it was all about Kiba this time.

Let’s get down to business. Rias Gremory has a new piece, and a swordswoman at that—Xenovia the Knight!

She’s a former Vatican Holy Sword user and wields the superpowerful Durendal.

Xenovia often takes incomprehensible courses of action that she ends up regretting later. Issei said it best when he admitted that she’s difficult to read. Incidentally, even after becoming a demon, she can still use Holy Swords. Impressive, huh?

I think it’s only fair that we take a look at some other new characters, too, don’t you agree?

First up, Chairwoman Sona Sitri (aka Souna Shitori). She’s the heir to the high-class Sitri demon family.

Next, we have Saji Genshirou. He’s a Pawn in Sona Sitri’s Familia. It’s a similar relationship to what Issei and Rias have.

Lastly, there’s Irina Shidou, Issei’s childhood friend. I wanted to introduce a character who works for the angels

and the Church. If the opportunity arises somewhere down the line, I'd like to feature her again to create a more complete view of the three factions.

Summer will have arrived by the next volume! And summer means swimsuits and pools! At the end of this volume, we heard that Rias and Akeno were out buying sexy swimsuits in an attempt to please Issei. That's what you can expect.

Asia and Rias will still be battling over our protagonist. Plus, we'll also have Akeno trying to take a bite out of him whenever she gets the chance, too. You can expect her to keep using her feminine weapons to come after poor, unsuspecting Issei. At this rate, it won't be long before he bleeds to death.

Huh? What's that? Xenovia is entering the fray as well?! Koneko too?!

Even as the author, I'm starting to get jealous of Issei. Dammit! Why does he have to be so popular?! Why does he get all those breasts?! I'm practically in tears as I write this.

This time, I refrained from putting Issei directly into the heat of battle. Even if he hasn't mastered it yet, he got his Balance Breaker at the end of the second volume, so I decided to give him a supporting role this time. Naturally, that meant that the other club members took heightened roles to compensate. Don't worry, though. He's going to be standing center stage next time.

In Volume 4, the bosses of the three main factions will reveal themselves. You could say that the story really ramps up from there. What's going to happen when they all come together?

You can probably expect to learn more about the events in this volume. We'll likely delve deeper into some new mysteries, too.

Let’s not forget that Albion the Vanishing Dragon finally made his first appearance. His entrance was certainly sudden, and he definitely upset the balance among characters. I wonder what’ll happen when he and Issei next meet…

Oh, Volume 4 will also introduce Rias’s other Bishop! I know I’ve kept you all waiting, but there will be a lot to look forward to!

Time for my acknowledgments.

I owe a lot of gratitude to Miyama-Zero for the beautiful illustrations! I’m sorry for all the trouble that adding so many new characters caused, but I’m looking forward to seeing the next batch of images!

To H, my editor, thank you for your spot-on advice! With your help, my thoughts and ideas are becoming more and more obscene! I’m well on the path to becoming a smut writer! If not for all your edits, we might have had to stick an age rating on this one!

(I know I went overboard on that scene with Akeno. I really appreciate your extensive rewrites.)

To my readers, thank you for all your support and fan letters! I was so happy to receive your illustrated correspondence that it brought a tear to my eye! The more you send along, the more motivated I’ll be to keep writing this erotic—no—this hot-blooded series we call *DxD*!

I’ll leave it at that. Please keep your eyes out for the breast-filled fourth volume. Rias and the other female members of the Occult Research Club will be waiting!

Ichiei Ishibumi

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